JUNE, 1952

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# ARGOSY

STORIES BY

GERALD KERSH

LORD DUNSANY

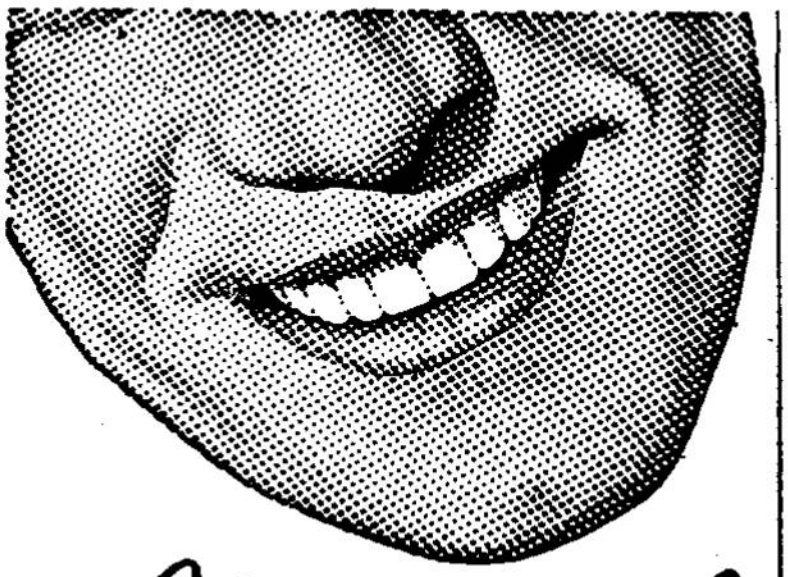
CLIVE BURNLEY

STUART CLOETE

FRANK O'ROURKE

JAMES RAMSEY ULLMAN

AND OTHERS



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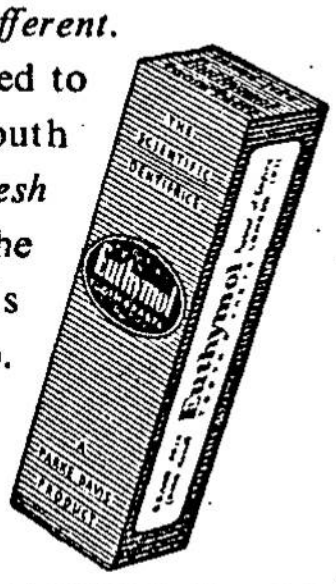


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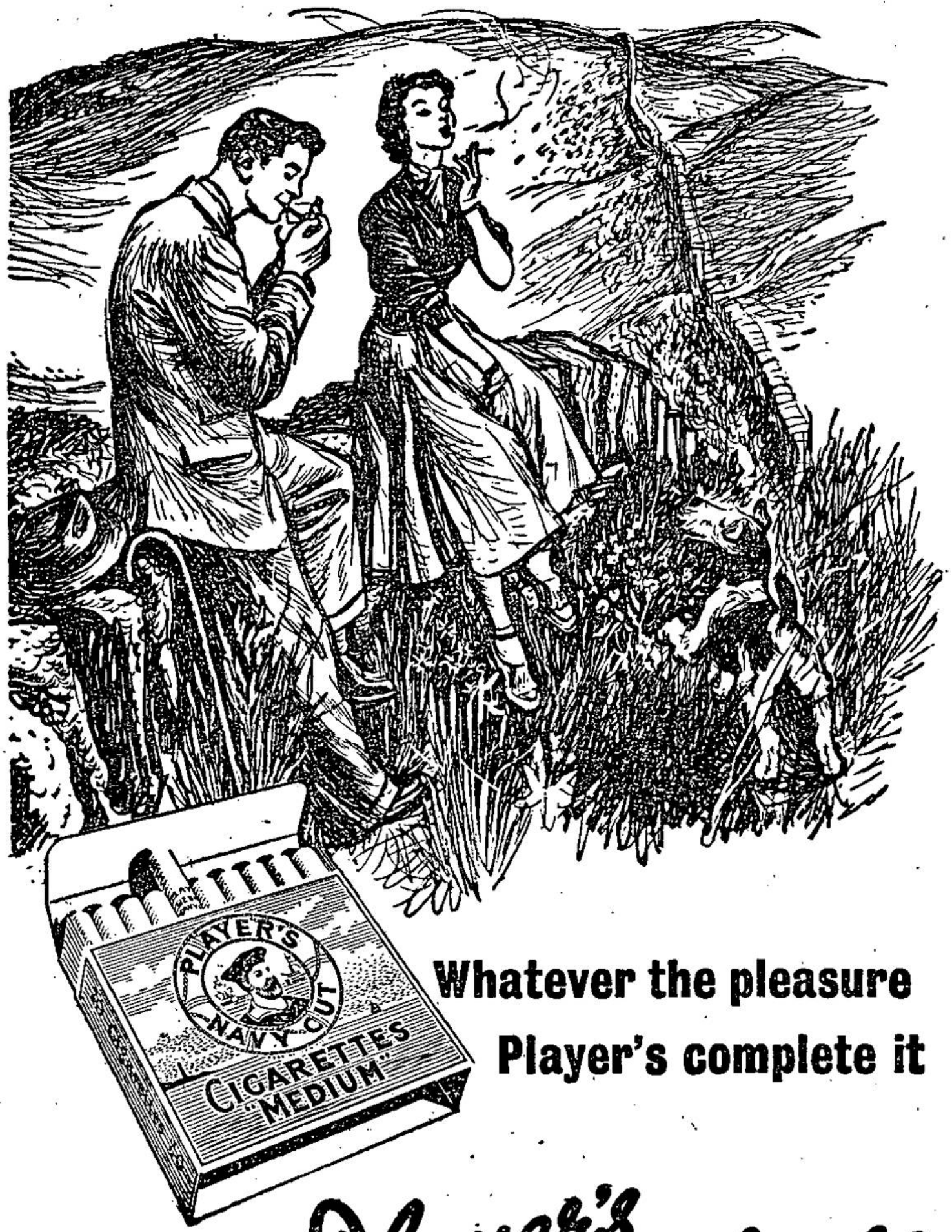


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# ARGOSY

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# High Summer

*WALKING with my lover*
*Among the fragrant clover*
*With a singing heart.*
*Fair and fine the summer day*
*Where along a sunny way*
*All the clouds depart.*

*Walking with my lover*
*Among the fragrant clover*
*Hand in hand we go.*
*All the birds have songs to bring*
*On a swift and joyous wing*
*Where trees are bending low.*

*Walking with my lover*
*Among the fragrant clover*
*Life is very good.*
*Lovely are the summer trees ;*
*Lovely every passing breeze ;*
*Lovely is the wood.*

PĀDRAIG O'HORAN

# CIRCUS AT BAY

## What, apart from high wires, do High Wire Queens think about?

## by CLIVE BURNLEY

I WAS driving down the road known, not without reason, as B six thousand seven hundred and two, thinking of nothing except what the score at the Oval might have become by this time, at peace with all the world and smoking a placid pipe, when several people—conspicuous among whom were a Mexican with a revolver in his hand, a policeman about four feet high, a pugilist in purple shorts and a girl in frilly red ones—rushed out of the hedge and waved me to stop. This I did at once, not only on account of that revolver, but because I seemed to have fulfilled one of my life's ambitions and driven slap-bang down Alice's rabbit hole.

It was in this manner that I came to take part in the famous kefuffle at Yarley Bottom, which is passing so rapidly into legend that any time now the folklore experts are likely to unearth it in the form of a twelfth century ballad unless I fix the facts once and for all.

The thing occurred, then, no earlier than last summer, around the massive and leonine frame of young Ambrose Ingleton, sole and irresponsible proprietor of *The Cakewold and Harne Invigilator*, which incorporates *The Longshorley and Headover Gazette.*

He had acquired this journal by the accident of inheritance, and he had kept it because no one was fool enough to buy it from him. He was a husky young man of the well known clean-limbed type, as distinct from the rest of us, who are mostly rather muddy on the knee-caps. He had yellow hair and a rugged countenance intriguingly offset by a deep dimple on the chin, and he was much more interested in cricket than in any kind of journalism except on those rare occasions when he was deeply stirred.

At such times he would rush into the paper's offices, which were over the pork butcher's in York Street, and there dictate to Miss Angela Beetle a white-hot denunciation of whatever it was. This always left Cakewold, Harne, Longshorley and Headover quite unmoved, since the paper was only purchased by people who wanted to see our Bessie's name in print or to find out who sent wreaths to old Barnacles' funeral.

On one such occasion, having come across six very bored

African lions on Headover Moor, where they were sprawling in a travelling waggon belonging to Zonto's Zenith Circus, Ambrose denounced in five hundred barbed words all those who exploited dumb animals, and in particular Mr. Zonto, whose degenerate entertainment he implored all humane readers to boycott. Lions, he pointed out, should live lions' lives, bounding through the Tanganyikan jungle; to cage them was clearly cruelty to animals.

He was proud of what he had written, not merely because of its trenchant style, but because he felt he had again demonstrated the incorruptibility of the Fourth Estate, inasmuch as Zonto had taken a full-page advertisement in the same issue without at all modifying editorial policy.

To Zonto, however, it appeared differently. He thought it rather sharp practice to accept ten guineas for an advertisement on page two and render it useless on page one. This un-English view was only to be expected from one whose manner, speech, and mental approach were so palpably alien that his enemies alleged him to be a South London cockney named Boswell. Whatever the truth of the matter, Zonto was undeniably a fine figure of a man, with moustaches like ravens' wings and a set of teeth which shone, when he showed them, like a fluorescent daylight tube some three inches long.

He was also a man of action.

On the very day of publication he called upon Ambrose in person to demand an apology, riding through Cakewold High Street in the Ruritanian hussar's uniform he used in the lion-taming act, accompanied by Heinrich the dwarf. Such a flamboyant cavalcade had not been seen in the town since the Wars of the Roses.

He saw Ambrose in the presence of the heavily bleached Miss Beetle, who felt for her employer that other-worldly devotion which girls of her age frequently lavish upon Messrs. Gable and Flynn. Zonto, glittering from head to foot in his fantastic uniform, loomed over the desk at which Ambrose sat, and point-blank demanded amends. Upon which Ambrose stood up to his full six foot three, to show that he also could loom, and, even more firmly point-blank, refused. It was in vain that the Borough-Bulgarian, or whatever he was, spoke passionately of his love for animals, or of the praise the R.S.P.C.A. had given him. Ambrose would concede nothing.

Now why this altercation between the two men got so thoroughly out of hand, I cannot be certain, but I suspect that the mere presence of Miss Beetle was something of a catalyst, transforming a humdrum argument into a close imitation of grand opera. Wide-eyed, intensely conscious of the drama of the occasion, with the dewy

look natural to her years and lack of discretion, she sat there radiating that kind of adulation which inspires egocentric males to compose masterpieces or even more frequently to commit murders.

After Ambrose had explained that lion tamers were not, as some held, brave men, but only cowards who used their superior cunning to exploit dumb animals, and after Zonto had expressed a desire to put his courage to the test, along with Mr. Ingleton's, in the most obvious way, the atmosphere grew so tense that Miss Beetle put in a panic call to the local police station. She was somehow connected instead to the Longshorley Sixpenny Bagwash Laundry Company, who kept saying "Pardon?" from the telephone receiver in the voice of a little zinc pixy.

In the meantime, to his secret surprise, Ambrose found himself following up Zonto's very practical suggestion with every appearance of eagerness, and the whole thing was arranged almost before they realized it. The place, Yarley Firs; the time, three o'clock that very afternoon; the business, combat.

"Vair' well," said Zonto, at the door, "you weel see! I am not nasty to ze animals, no. But one animal I shall be vair' nasty to. 'E'll weesh 'e was a lion een 'ees cage, you see eef not!"

"Oh Ambrose," cried Miss Beetle, "how brave you are!"

"Frayed?" said the little zinc Bagwash pixy, losing its patience, "What d'you expect for sixpence?"

As soon as he had removed himself from both provocation and inspiration Ambrose had second and more sober thoughts. But he was above all a man of his word and had no thought of breaking it.

That afternoon he drove to the rendezvous in his shiny pre-war M.G., stopping at the "Fiddle and Cat" en route to take a double whisky, feel his biceps, and reflect that he had won a novice's belt in his teens.

By the sombre conifers on the lumpy common, with the green-striped roof of Zonto's Big Top visible half a mile away in the valley, he stopped. His opponent was awaiting him. From some idea of the fitness of things Zonto had changed and now appeared in heavily braided Mexican charro costume, and an embroidered sombrero as large as a cart wheel. He was accompanied by a motley band of adherents: Heinrich the dwarf in his police outfit, with whistle and truncheon, the two Ochalinis, those equestrian wizards, looking as if they were about to go out with the Quorn, and two extensively bared people, the first a lightly muscled brunette in half a dozen scarlet frills, and the second a ginger-haired, broken-nosed, brutally sinewed man wearing purple drawers and plimsolls. They watched Ambrose approach with hostile eyes.

"But 'oly damnations!" cried Zonto, greatly concerned. "You are not alone? Eet's not possible! You *must* not be alone!"

"Oh, well," said Ambrose, wondering if he saw an avenue of escape, "if you think—"

"He's not alone!" called a shrill voice. "Ambrose, I am here!"—and, flinging her bicycle into the hedge, Miss Angela Beetle, in green corduroy trousers and a blouse plainly marked A.B., leapt into the group and stood there as if she were modelling Joan of Arc for a traditionalist sculptor.

"Ah!" said Zonto, frowning no more. "Vair' well. Zere is no objection to a lady second, I t'ink?—So, to beezness, then. 'Ere's a pretty piece of grass, flat and green; maybe we colour it deef'rent soon, eh? Heinrich, the case."

The dwarf constable took up one of three cases which were lying at the foot of the hedge and, saying something in what seemed to Ambrose a very foreign tongue indeed, he opened it. Inside lay two revolvers, unmistakably lethal, gleaming maliciously from every machined surface.

"Zere!" said Zonto, tenderly. "Zose loverly zings! Please to choose, sir, and zen, Heinrich, you pace the ground. But no, you are too cut off about the leg. I t'ink we—"

"Hey!" said Ambrose. "Not so fast! You don't think I'm going to use those things, do you? They're dangerous!"

"Oho!" cried Zonto. "'Oly 'orrors, is zat it? So you back down, beeg-talk coward? You show ze yellow ribbon no? You refuse to fight?"

"I don't refuse at all," said Ambrose, "I'll fight you any time, *my* way." He displayed his doubled fist, to make himself clear. "The Englishman's way!"

"Bah!" roared Zonto. "What way is zat for a man of honour? Zat peasant's way! In my country ze strit-sweppers know better!"

"Don't you *dare* talk to him like that!" cried Miss Beetle.

"Now look here," said Ambrose, appealing to the group around the circus master. "This is simply childish. If it's your idea of a joke I can't say I care for your sense of humour. Why, it's asking for trouble, carrying those murderous things about, let alone—"

"But no," said Zonto. "Not murder. I only break a leg, or an arm, per'aps. Nozzing more."

A short silence followed during which the two principals exchanged stern and contemptuous glances. Then the girl in the red frills took a pace forward. She was a brunette with a jewel-glint in her dark eye and a particularly cosmopolitan type of beauty, so that it was surprising that she should speak in a comfortable West Country drawl.

"It's easy enough, man," said Arnaldine, Queen of the High Wire. "Zonto's way of fighting is with guns, and yours is with fists, and the two don't mix. But let's see what you can both do in your separate ways, and then—well, there's six of us here, and that's good enough for a jury; we can give a verdict who won. You start off, Zonto; show us your hand. But mind you choose a target as won't bleed, now."

She had to explain it a second time, and then Ambrose objected: "What do I do—shadow-box?"

The broken-nosed man in the purple shorts stepped forward and grinned unpleasantly.

"It'll be a pleasure," he said, "to help you out, pal, in that partikler. I reckon I can bring out any talent you got. Old Heinrich can keep time and blow for rounds with his toy whistle."

"Well, now," said Arnaldine, "and isn't it a good thing you came with us, then. This is Loo Morgan," she explained to Ambrose, "the Cardiff Kid. Runs the boxing booth on the tober, and it's worth five quid to anybody that goes five rounds with him."

"And never paid out once yet," said the Cardiff Kid smugly, "in five year."

Ambrose laughed scornfully.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "What a pantomime! All this play-acting to get me framed with this punch-drunk gorilla! Very clever indeed! But if you think I'm frightened of this pug-faced relic of the Stone Age," he said, while Loo Morgan's face turned a sullen purple, "you're mistaken. I'd take him on anywhere I could get fair play. But what sort of a jury d'you think you are? You're all Zonto's mob, the whole gang of you. Give me one impartial independent judge—that's all I ask—and I'm you're man."

No one took any notice of Miss Beetle's clamouring for the appointment, and Ambrose was beginning to feel that he had extricated himself from a difficult situation with consummate tact, when Zonto cried, "I find you a judge!", stepped through the hedge on to B six thousand seven hundred and two, and flung up his hand in front of the first car that came along. It was unfortunate that the occupants of this first car were the Misses Crump, out to do their week's shopping, who extricated themselves with difficulty and later forgot their fish in sheer agitation; but the second car was mine.

I pride myself on being a rather sporting type, in a modified Regency manner. I spring from a long line of Leicestershire cockfighters. Of course it took a vast amount of explanation before I understood what it was all about, but once I had grasped the idea and after the taller of the two Ochalinis had, as a gesture of cordiality,

given me a pull at a hip flask of rum he had at his coat tails, I agreed readily and the famous duel at Yarley Bottom began.

As a curtain raiser Mr. Zonto showed us what he could do with his guns. I subsequently discovered that in addition to being proprietor and ringmaster of his show, appearing as Marco, King of the King of Beasts and as one of the two Juggling Jeremies, Zonto, that man of parts, was billed as Don Roberto, Master Marksman of Mexico. He therefore did his act, or as much of it as possible, shooting a cigarette out of Arnaldine's lips, putting two holes through a hat flung in the air, and removing the pips of playing cards. It was all quite impressive and I told him he ought to be in a circus, which somehow quite nonplussed him, while we waited for the second part of the programme.

This followed immediately. Ambrose took off his shirt, Heinrich produced four-ounce gloves from another of the cases by the hedge, and the Ochalinis appointed themselves seconds, one to each fighter. Their shining top hats gave a gallant Corinthian air to the whole thing. The hot sun blazed down with alien intensity, the two girls sat on the bank, Zonto scowled and shook his fist, I told the boys to come out fighting and break clean, Heinrich blew his whistle and we were off.

It was at once apparent that the tawny-skinned, slightly bow-legged, and very light-footed Cardiff Kid was considerably older in this particular kind of sin than the taller and pink-shouldered Ambrose. For within seconds of the opening whistle Ambrose had taken three punches which landed with the sound of a woodsman's axe and with much the same effect, bursting his face rather unhandsomely above the right eyebrow. Miss Beetle's dream world had never been quite so horribly tangible as this and she covered her face with her hands. Behind the blood Mr. Ingleton's countenance was tense, agonized, and very pale, but the Welshman came in with a malicious sneer upon his not very refined features and by the end of the first round the fight, so far as I could see, was a foregone conclusion.

The second round followed the same pattern, although Ambrose certainly did achieve the satisfaction of knocking over Zonto, his real enemy, but since he only did this by falling upon him after having received a particularly savage right uppercut from Mr. Morgan, it was, I suppose, no particular comfort to him.

But the third round was different. If you are expecting, having come with me so far, that Ambrose, the underdog, should, after a titanic struggle, emerge victorious, I must disappoint you. It did not happen quite like that. But for the first time he began to move with an appearance of knowing what he was about and

although, in the four other rounds which followed, he received at least three blunt messages from the Cardiff Kid in return for every one he despatched, he contrived, at least once in every round, to send something really heavy by parcel post.

It was usually a right hook, and it plainly set Mr. Morgan's vertebrae rattling like shunted goods trucks. It forced him to hold on and then, after I had shouted "Break!"—he would box very skilfully but completely as an automaton for a few seconds until his brain had stopped bouncing about inside his cranium.

In rounds four, five, six and seven, the Welshman's punches flickered and flashed upon Ambrose in dozens and scores: but it was only when one of Ambrose's haymakers came thumping home that we all jerked where we sat and cried "Ooh!" The Cardiff Kid never actually went down, and never looked like losing his points lead; but from time to time he was, no doubt about it, hurt.

At the end of the seventh round the two had broken apart and were sitting down panting and glistening with blood and sweat when Morgan suddenly called Heinrich and bade him take his gloves off. "I don't give up," said the Cardiff Kid. "I quit."

This didn't make sense to me.

"You're a good kid," he said to Ambrose. "Six months in my shack and you'd do for Jack Solomons. But I got my living to think of. I gotta open up tonight and take the shine off the lads of the village. If you want to finish it we can do it there, in the regular way of business. I'm not going to lose me stock-in-trade for you, Zonto," he said. "It's all right for you, you black-whiskered old crow!"

"Nothing remains for me," I said, "except to award the honours to Mr. Ingleton."

The Cardiff Kid patted his opponent on the shoulders.

"If you ever want a job, pal," he said, "sixty bob a week, doss in the waggon, and find your own grub, just you look up Loo Morgan."

And with that, because he had no dressing gown and the perspiration was drying on his skin, he set off at a steady trot along the footpath through the coppice to the fair ground.

Zonto and the Ochalinis began to talk furiously and in foreign tongues. I slung my raincoat round Ambrose's shoulders, gave him a cigarette, and followed him as he wandered in a muddle headed sort of way through the trees until he reached the stile, upon which he perched himself, still breathing heavily.

And then, through that little wood towards us, in her own flawless complexion extensively exhibited, and her few scarlet

frills, came Arnaldine, Queen of the High Wire. She was carrying a little white box with a red cross on the lid. She pushed me gently aside and sat on the stile beside Ambrose.

"Hold still, now," she said and began to bathe and anoint his split and blood-stained face.

He looked at her in the greatest astonishment. For some time he said nothing.

"I really believe," he said at last, "that you people *are* kind to lions, after all."

She smiled without answering and her face, while she concentrated on the split eyebrow, was only an inch or two from his. This proximity seemed to have some effect upon him.

"I say," he said, turning to me, "do me a favour. Go back and ask Miss Beetle to tell the office I'll be starting my summer holidays from today."

"Ah!" I said. "Convalescing?"

"Well, no. Not exactly. The fact is—I think I'll take Loo Morgan up on that offer of his."

"That's his waggon," said Arnaldine, pointing down into the valley. "The green one."

But I didn't find Miss Beetle. She had come out of her trance to discover that both the boxers had vanished and that Zonto, having recovered the sense of humour he had momentarily mislaid, was drinking out of the Ochalinis' hip flask with his left hand while firing *feux de joie* at fir cones with his right. This had alarmed her to such an extent that she had dragged her bicycle out of the hedge and pedalled furiously to Longshorley to call the police. But she did not know that village very well and as the result of a misdirection—this is the most extraordinary angle of the whole story—found herself knocking at what proved to be the door of the Sixpenny Bagwash Laundry Company.

By the time Police Constable Grundlewood arrived that evening at the tober to make enquiries, Mr. Ambrose Ingleton (who, after much thought, had taken the alias of Dynamo Driscoll) having been lent by his employer to Zonto, was heaving chunks of horse-meat through the bars to the lions in the menagerie waggon, whistling cheerfully out of his smashed lips and wondering what High Wire Queens thought about, apart from high wires.

I have every reason to believe he found out, in the course of time.

* * *

*The contents of an English June are hay and ice, orange-flowers and rheumatism!*

HORACE WALPOLE

# THE SUMMIT

## If any of us ever reached it, it would be one of those two

## by JAMES RAMSEY ULLMAN

THE gorge bent. The walls fell suddenly away and we came out on the edge of a bleak, boulder-strewn valley. And there it was.

Osborn saw it first. He had been leading the column, threading his way slowly among the huge rock masses of the gorge's mouth. Then he came to the first flat, bare place and stopped. He neither pointed nor cried out, but every man behind him knew instantly what it was. The long file sprang taut, like a jerked rope. As swiftly as we could, but in complete silence, we came out into the open ground where Osborn stood, and raised our eyes with his. In the records of the Indian Topographical Survey it says :

*Kalpurtha : a mountain in the Himalayas, altitude* 28,000 *ft. The fourth highest peak in the world. Also known as* K3. *Tertiary formation of sedimentary limestone . . .*

There were men among us who had spent months of their lives—in some cases, years—reading, thinking, planning about what now lay before us, but at that moment statistics and geology, knowledge, thought and plans, were as remote and forgotten as the faraway western cities from which we had come. We were men bereft of everything but eyes, everything but the single, electric perception : There it was !

Before us the valley stretched away into miles of rocky desolation. To right and left it was bounded by low ridges which, as the eye followed them, slowly mounted and drew closer together until the valley was no longer a valley at all, but a narrowing, rising corridor between the cliffs. What happened then I can describe only as a single, stupendous crash of music. At the end of the corridor and above it—so far above it that it shut out half the sky—hung the blinding white mass of K3.

It was like the many pictures I had seen, and at the same time utterly unlike them. The shape was there, and the familiar distinguishing features—the sweeping skirt of glaciers ; the monstrous

vertical precipices of the face and the jagged ice line of the east ridge; finally the symmetrical summit pyramid that transfixed the sky. But whereas in the pictures the mountain had always seemed unreal—a dream image of cloud, snow and crystal—it was now no longer an image at all. It was a mass, solid, imminent, appalling. We were still too far away to see the windy whipping of its snow plumes or to hear the cannonading of its avalanches, but in that sudden, silent moment every man of us was for the first time aware of it, not as a picture in his mind but as a presence, an antagonist. For all its twenty-eight thousand feet of lofty grandeur, it seemed, somehow, less to tower than to crouch—a white-hooded giant, secret and remote, but living. Living and on guard.

I turned my eyes from the dazzling glare and looked at my companions. Osborn still stood a little in front of the others. He was absolutely motionless, his young face tense and shining, his eyes devouring the mountain as a lover's might devour the face of his beloved. One could feel in the very set of his body the overwhelming desire that swelled in him to act, to come to grips, to conquer. A little behind him were ranged the other white men of the expedition: Randolph, our leader, Wittmer and Johns, Dr. Schlapp and Bixler. All were still, their eyes cast upward. Off to one side a little stood Nace, the Englishman, the only one among us who was not staring at K3 for the first time. He had been the last to come up out of the gorge and stood now with arms folded on his chest, squinting at the great peak he had known so long and fought so tirelessly and fiercely. His lean English face, under its mask of stubble and windburn, was expressionless. His lips were a colourless line, and his eyes seemed almost shut. Behind the sahibs ranged the porters, bent over their staffs, their brown, seamed faces straining upward from beneath their loads.

For a long while no one spoke or moved. The only sounds between earth and sky were the soft hiss of our breathing and the pounding of our hearts.

Through the long afternoon we wound slowly between the great boulders of the valley and at sundown pitched camp in the bed of a dried-up stream. The porters ate their rations in silence, wrapped themselves in their blankets and fell asleep under the stars. The rest of us, as was our custom, sat close about the fire that blazed in the circle of tents, discussing the events of the day and the plans for the next. It was a flawlessly clear Himalayan night, and K3 tiered up into the blackness like a monstrous sentinel lighted from within. There was no wind, but a great tide of cold air crept down the valley from the ice fields above, penetrating our clothing, pressing gently against the canvas of the tents.

" Another night or two and we'll be needing the sleeping bags," commented Randolph.

Osborn nodded. " We could use them tonight, would be my guess."

Randolph turned to Nace. " What do you say, Martin ? "

The Englishman puffed at his pipe a moment. " Rather think it might be better to wait," he said at last.

" Wait ? Why ? " Osborn jerked his head up.

" Well, it gets pretty nippy high up, you know. I've seen it thirty below at twenty-five thousand on the east ridge. Longer we wait for the bags, the better acclimatized we'll get."

Osborn snorted. " A lot of good being acclimatized will do if we have frozen feet."

" Easy, Paul, easy," cautioned Randolph. " It seems to me Martin's right."

Osborn bit his lip, but said nothing. The other men entered the conversation, and soon it had veered to other matters : the weather, the porters and pack animals, routes, camps and strategy —the inevitable, inexhaustible topics of the climbers' world.

There were all kinds of men among the eight of us, men with a great diversity of background and interest. Sayre Randolph, whom the Alpine Club had named leader of our expedition, had for years been a well-known explorer and lecturer. Now in his middle fifties, he was no longer equal to the gruelling physical demands of high climbing, but served as planner and organizer of the enterprise. Wittmer was a lawyer, who had recently made a name for himself by a series of difficult ascents in the Coast Range of British Columbia. Johns was an Alaskan, fantastically strong, who had been a ranger in the U.S. Forest Service and had accompanied many famous Alaskan expeditions. Schlapp was a practising physician from Milwaukee, Bixler a meteorologist with a talent for photography. I, at the time, was an assistant professor of geology.

Finally, and pre-eminently, there were Osborn and Nace. I say " pre-eminently," because even at this time, when we had been together as a party for little more than a month, I believe all of us realized that these were the two key men of our venture. None, to my knowledge, ever expressed it in words, but the conviction was there, nevertheless, that if any of us were eventually to stand on the hitherto unconquered summit of K3, it would be one of them, or both.

They were utterly dissimilar men. Osborn was twenty-three and a year down from the university, a compact, buoyant mass of energy and high spirits. He seemed to be wholly unaffected by either the physical or mental hazards of mountaineering and had

already, by virtue of many spectacular ascents in the Alps and Rockies, won a reputation as one of the most skilled and audacious of younger climbers. Nace was in his forties—lean, taciturn, introspective. An official in the Indian Civil Service, he had explored and climbed in the Himalayas for twenty years. He had been a member of all five of the unsuccessful British expeditions to K3, and in his last attempt had attained to within five hundred feet of the summit, the highest point which any man had reached on the unconquered giant. This had been the famous tragic attempt in which his fellow climber and lifelong friend, Captain Furness, had slipped and fallen ten thousand feet to his death. Nace rarely mentioned his name, but on the steel head of his ice axe were engraved the words: *To Martin from John.* If fate were to grant that the axe of any one of us should be planted upon the summit of K3, I hoped it would be his.

Such were the men who huddled about the fire in the deep, still cold of that Himalayan night. There were many differences among us, in temperament as well as in background. In one or two cases, notably that of Osborn and Nace, there had already been a certain amount of friction, and as the venture continued and the struggles and hardships of the actual ascent began, it would, I knew, increase.

But differences were unimportant. What mattered—all that mattered—was that our purpose was one—to conquer the monster of rock and ice that now loomed above us in the night; to stand for a moment where no man, no living thing, had ever stood before. To that end we had come from half a world away, across oceans and continents to the fastnesses of inner Asia. To that end we were prepared to endure cold, exhaustion and danger, even to the very last extremity of human endurance. Why? There is no answer, and at the same time every man among us knew the answer; every man who has ever looked upon a great mountain and felt the fever in his blood to climb and conquer, knows the answer. George Leigh Mallory, greatest of mountaineers, expressed it once and for all when he was asked why he wanted to climb unconquered Everest. "I want to climb it," said Mallory, "because it's there."

Day after day we crept on and upward. The naked desolation of the valley was unrelieved by any motion, colour or sound, and, as we progressed, it was like being trapped at the bottom of a deep well or in a sealed court between great skyscrapers. Soon we were thinking of the ascent of the shining mountain not only as an end in itself but as an escape.

In our nightly discussions around the fire, our conversation

narrowed more and more to the immediate problems confronting us, and during them I began to realize that the tension between Osborn and Nace went deeper than I had at first surmised. There was rarely any outright argument between them—they were both far too able mountain men to disagree on fundamentals—but I saw that at almost every turn they were rubbing each other the wrong way.

It was a matter of personalities chiefly. Osborn was talkative, enthusiastic, optimistic, always chafing to be up and at it, always wanting to take the short, straight line to the given point. Nace, on the other hand, was matter-of-fact, cautious, slow. He was the apostle of trial-and-error and watchful waiting. Because of his far greater experience and intimate knowledge of K3, Randolph almost invariably followed his advice, rather than Osborn's, when a difference of opinion arose. The younger man usually capitulated with good grace, but I could tell that he was irked.

During the days in the valley I had few occasions to talk privately with either of them, and only once did either mention the other in any but the most casual manner. Even then, the remarks they made seemed unimportant, and I remember them only in view of what happened later.

My conversation with Osborn occurred first. It was while we were on the march, and Osborn, who was directly behind me, came up suddenly to my side.

"You're a geologist, Frank," he began without preamble. "What do you think of Nace's theory about the ridge?"

"What theory?" I asked.

"He believes we should traverse under it from the glacier up. Says the ridge itself is too exposed."

"It looks pretty mean through the telescope."

"But it's been done before. He's done it himself. All right, it's tough—I'll admit that. But a decent climber could make it in half the time the traverse will take."

"Nace knows the traverse is longer," I said. "But he seems certain it will be much easier for us."

"Easier for him is what he means." Osborn paused, looking moodily at the ground. "He was a great climber in his day. It's a damn shame a man can't be honest enough with himself to know when he's through." He fell silent and a moment later dropped back into his place in line.

It was that same night, I think, that I awoke to find Nace sitting up in his blanket and staring at the mountain.

"How clear it is," I whispered.

The Englishman pointed. "See the ridge?"

I nodded, my eyes fixed on the great, twisting spine of ice that

climbed into the sky. I could see now, more clearly than in the blinding sunlight, its huge indentation and jagged, wind-swept pitches.

"It looks impossible," I said.

"No, it can be done. Trouble is, when you've made it, you're too done in for the summit."

"Osborn seems to think its shortness would make up for its difficulty."

Nace was silent a long moment before answering. Then for the first and only time I heard him speak the name of his dead companion. "That's what Furness thought," he said quietly. Then he lay down and wrapped himself in his blanket.

For the next two weeks the uppermost point of the valley was our home and workshop. We established our base camp as close to the mountain as we could, less than half a mile from the tongue of its lowest glacier, and plunged into the arduous tasks of preparation for the ascent. Our food and equipment were unpacked, inspected and sorted, and finally repacked in lighter loads for transport to more advanced camps. Hours on end were spent poring over maps and charts and studying the monstrous heights above us through telescope and binoculars. Under Nace's supervision, a thorough reconnaissance of the glacier was made and the route across it laid out; then began the back-breaking labour of moving up supplies and establishing the advance stations.

Camps I and II were set up on the glacier itself, in the most sheltered sites we could find. Camp III we built at its upper end, as near as possible to the point where the great rock spine of K3 thrust itself free of ice and began its precipitous ascent. According to our plans, this would be the advance base of operations during the climb; the camps to be established higher up, on the mountain proper, would be too small and too exposed to serve as anything more than one or two nights' shelter. The total distance between the base camp and Camp III was only fifteen miles, but the utmost daily progress of our porters was five miles, and it was essential that we should never be more than twelve hours' march from food and shelter. Hour after hour, day after day, the long file of men wound up and down among the hummocks and crevasses of the glacier, and finally the time arrived when we were ready to advance.

Leaving Dr. Schlapp in command of eight porters at the base camp, we proceeded easily and on schedule, reaching Camp I the first night, Camp II the second and the advance base the third. No men were left at Camps I and II, inasmuch as they were designed simply as caches for food and equipment; and, furthermore, we knew we would need all the manpower available for the establishment of the higher camps on the mountain proper.

For more than three weeks now the weather had held perfectly, but on our first night at the advance base, as if by malignant pre-arrangement of Nature, we had our first taste of the supernatural fury of a high Himalayan storm. It began with great streamers of lightning that flashed about the mountain like a halo ; then heavily, through the weird glare, snow began to fall. The wind howled about the tents with hurricane frenzy, and the wild flapping of the canvas dinned in our ears like machine-gun fire.

There was no sleep for us that night or the next. For thirty-six hours the storm raged without lull, while we huddled in the icy gloom of the tents. At last, on the third morning, it was over, and we came out into a world transformed by a twelve-foot cloak of snow. No single landmark remained as it had been before, and our supplies and equipment were in the wildest confusion. Fortunately, there had not been a single serious injury, but it was another three days before we had regained our strength and put the camp in order.

Then we waited. The storm did not return, and the sky beyond the ridges gleamed flawlessly clear, but night and day we could hear the roaring thunder of avalanches on the mountain above us. To have ventured so much as one step into that savage, vertical wilderness before the new-fallen snow froze tight would have been suicidal. We chafed or waited patiently, according to our individual temperaments, while the days dragged by.

It was late one afternoon when Osborn returned from a short reconnaissance up the ridge. His eyes were shining and his voice jubilant:

" It's tight ! " he cried. " Tight as a drum ! We can go ! " All of us stopped whatever we were doing. His excitement leaped like an electric spark from one to another. " I went about a thousand feet, and it's sound all the way. What do you say, Sayre ? To-morrow ? "

Randolph hesitated a moment, then looked at Nace.

" Better give it another day or two," said the Englishman.

Osborn glared at him. " Why ? " he challenged.

" It's generally safer to wait until—"

" Wait ! Wait ! " Osborn exploded. " Don't you ever think of anything but waiting ? The snow's firm, I tell you ! "

" It's firm down here," Nace replied quietly, " because the sun hits it only two hours a day. Up above it gets the sun twelve hours. It may not have frozen yet."

" The avalanches have stopped."

" That doesn't necessarily mean it will hold a man's weight."

" It seems to me, Martin's point—" Randolph began.

Osborn wheeled on him. " Sure," he snapped. " I know.

Martin's right. The cautious bloody English are always right. Let him have his way, and we'll be sitting here twiddling our thumbs until the mountain falls down on us." His eyes flashed to Nace. "Maybe with a little less of that bloody cautiousness, you English wouldn't have made such a mess of Everest. Maybe your pals Mallor and Furness wouldn't be dead."

"Osborn!" commanded Randolph sharply.

The youngster stared at Nace for another moment, breathing heavily. Then, abruptly, he turned away.

The next two days were clear and windless, but we still waited, following Nace's advice. There were no further brushes between him and Osborn, but an unpleasant air of restlessness and tension hung over the camp. I found myself chafing almost as impatiently as Osborn himself for the moment when we would break out of that maddening inactivity and begin the assault.

At last the day came. With the first paling of the sky, a roped file of men, bent almost double beneath heavy loads, began slowly to climb the ice slope just beneath the jagged line of the great east ridge.

In accordance with pre-arranged plan, we proceeded in relays, this first group consisting of Nace, Johns, myself and eight porters. It was our job to ascend approximately two thousand feet in a day's climbing and establish Camp IV at the most level and sheltered site we could find. We would spend the night there and return to the advance base next day, while the second relay, consisting of Osborn, Wittmer and eight more porters, went up with their loads.

This process was to continue until all necessary supplies were at Camp IV, and then the whole thing would be repeated between Camps IV and V, and V and VI. From VI, at an altitude of about 26,000 feet, the ablest and fittest men—presumably Nace and Osborn—would make the direct assault on the summit. Randolph and Bixler were to remain at the advance base throughout the operations, acting as directors and co-ordinators. We were under the strictest orders that any man, sahib or porter, who suffered illness or injury should be brought down immediately.

How shall I describe those next two weeks beneath the great ice ridge of K3? In a sense, there was no occurrence of importance, and at the same time everything happened that could possibly happen, short of actual disaster. We established Camp IV, came down again, went up again, came down again. Then we crept laboriously higher. The wind increased, and the air grew steadily colder and more difficult to breathe. One morning two of the porters awoke with their feet frozen black; they had to be sent down.

Shortly after this, Johns developed an uncontrollable bleeding at the nose and was forced to descend to a lower camp. Wittmer was suffering from splitting headaches and I from a continually dry throat. But providentially, the one enemy we feared the most in that icy, gale-lashed hell did not again attack us—no snow fell. And day by day, foot by foot, we ascended.

It is during ordeals like this that the surface trappings of a man are shed and his secret mettle laid bare. There were no shirkers or quitters among us—I had known that from the beginning—but now, with each passing day, it became more manifest which were the strongest and ablest among us. Beyond all argument, these were Osborn and Nace.

Osborn was magnificent. All the boyish impatience and moodiness which he had exhibited earlier were gone, and, now that he was at last at work in his natural element, he emerged as the peerless mountaineer he was. His energy was inexhaustible, and his speed, both on rock and ice, almost twice that of any other man in the party. He was always discovering new routes and short cuts; and there was such vigour, buoyancy and youth in everything he did that it gave heart to all the rest of us.

In contrast, Nace was slow, methodical, unspectacular. Since he and I worked in the same relay, I was with him almost constantly, and to this day I carry in my mind the clear image of the man—his tall body bent almost double against endless, shimmering slopes of ice; his lean brown face bent in utter concentration on the problem in hand, then raised searchingly to the next; the bright prong of his axe rising, falling, rising, falling with tireless rhythm, until the steps in the glassy incline were so wide and deep that the most clumsy of the porters could not have slipped from them had he tried. Osborn attacked the mountain, head on. Nace studied it, sparred with it, wore it down. His spirit did not flap from his sleeve like a pennon; it was deep inside him, patient, indomitable.

The day came soon when I learned from him what it is to be a great mountaineer. We were making the ascent from Camp IV to V, and an almost perpendicular ice wall had made it necessary for us to come out for a few yards on the exposed crest of the ridge. There were six of us in the party, roped together, with Nace leading, myself second and four porters bringing up the rear. The ridge at this particular point was free of snow, but razor-thin, and the rocks were covered with a smooth glaze of ice. On either side the mountain dropped away in sheer precipices of five thousand feet.

Suddenly the last porter slipped. In what seemed to be the same instant I heard the ominous scraping of boot nails and,

turning, saw a wildly gesticulating figure plunge sideways into the abyss.

There was a scream as the next porter followed him. I remember trying frantically to dig into the ridge with my axe, realizing at the same time it would no more hold against the weight of the falling man than a pin stuck in a wall. Then I heard Nace shout, "Jump!" As he said it, the rope went tight about my waist, and I went hurtling after him into space on the opposite side of the ridge. After me came the nearest porter.

What happened then must have happened in five yards and a fifth of a second. I heard myself cry out, and the glacier, a mile below, rushed up at me, spinning. Then both were blotted out in a violent spasm, as the rope jerked taut. I hung for a moment, an inert mass, feeling that my body had been cut in two; then I swung in slowly to the side of the mountain. Above me the rope lay tight and motionless across the crest of the ridge, our weight exactly counterbalancing that of the men who had fallen on the far slope.

Nace's voice came up from below. "You chaps on the other side!" he shouted. "Start climbing slowly! We're climbing too!"

In five minutes we had all regained the ridge. The porters and I crouched panting on the jagged rocks, our eyes closed, the sweat beading our faces in frozen drops. Nace carefully examined the rope that again hung loosely between us.

"All right, men," he said presently. "Let's get on to camp for a cup of tea."

Above Camp V the whole aspect of the ascent changed. The angle of the ridge eased off, and the ice, which lower down had covered the mountain like a sheath, lay only in scattered patches between the rocks. Fresh enemies, however, instantly appeared to take the place of the old. We were now labouring at an altitude of more than 25,000 feet—well above the summits of the highest surrounding peaks—and day and night, without protection or respite, we were buffeted by the savage fury of the wind. Worse than this was that the atmosphere had become so rarefied it could scarcely support life.

Breathing itself was a major physical effort, and our progress upward consisted of two or three painful steps, followed by a long period of rest in which our hearts pounded wildly and our burning lungs gasped for air. Each of us carried a small cylinder of oxygen in our pack, but we used it only in emergencies, and found that, though its immediate effect was salutary, it left us later even worse off than before.

But the great struggle was now mental rather than physical. The lack of air induced a lethargy of mind and spirit; confidence and the powers of thought and decision waned. The mountain, to all of us, was no longer a mere giant of rock and ice; it had become a living thing, an enemy, watching us, waiting for us, hostile, relentless.

On the fifteenth day after we had first left the advance base, we pitched Camp VI at an altitude of 26,500 feet. It was located near the uppermost extremity of the great east ridge, directly beneath the so-called shoulder of the mountain. On the far side of the shoulder the stupendous north face of K3 fell sheer to the glaciers, two miles below. Above it and to the left rose the symmetrical bulk of the summit pyramid. The topmost rocks of its highest pinnacle were clearly visible from the shoulder, and the intervening fifteen hundred feet seemed to offer no insuperable obstacles.

Camp VI, which was in reality no camp at all but a single tent, was large enough to accommodate only three men. Osborn established it with the aid of Wittmer and one porter; then, the following morning, Wittmer and the porter descended to Camp V, and Nace and I went up.

It was our plan that Osborn and Nace should launch the final assault—the next day, if the weather held—with myself in support, following their progress through binoculars and going to their aid or summoning help from below if anything went wrong. As the three of us lay in the tent that night, the summit seemed already within arm's reach, victory securely in our grasp.

And then the blow fell. With fiendishly malignant timing, which no power on earth could have made us believe was a simple accident of nature, the mountain hurled at us its last line of defence. It snowed.

For a day and a night the great flakes drove down upon us, swirling and swooping in the wind, blotting out the summit, the shoulder, everything beyond the tiny white-walled radius of our tent. At last, during the morning of the following day, it cleared. The sun came out in a thin blue sky, and the summit pyramid again appeared above us, now whitely robed in fresh snow. But still we waited. Until the snow either froze or was blown away by the wind, it would have been the rashest courting of destruction for us to have ascended a foot beyond the camp. Another day passed. And another.

By the third nightfall our nerves were at breaking point. For hours on end we had scarcely moved or spoken, and the only sounds in all the world were the endless moaning of the wind outside and the harsh, sucking noise of our breathing. I knew that, one way or

another, the end had come. Our meagre food supply was running out; even with careful rationing, there was enough left for only two more days.

Presently Nace stirred in his sleeping bag and sat up. "We'll have to go down tomorrow," he said quietly.

For a moment there was silence in the tent. Then Osborn struggled to a sitting position and faced him.

"No," he said.

"There's still too much loose snow above. We can't make it."

"But it's clear. As long as we can see—"

Nace shook his head. "Too dangerous. We'll go down tomorrow and lay in a fresh supply. Then we'll try again."

"Once we go down we're licked. You know it."

Nace shrugged. "Better to be licked than—" The strain of speech was suddenly too much for him and he fell into a violent paroxysm of coughing. When it had passed, there was a long silence.

Then, suddenly, Osborn spoke again. "Look, Nace," he said, "I'm going up tomorrow."

The Englishman shook his head.

"I'm going—understand?"

For the first time since I had known him, I saw Nace's eyes flash in anger. "I'm the senior member of this group," he said. "I forbid you to go!"

With a tremendous effort, Osborn jerked himself to his feet. "You forbid me? This may be your sixth time on this mountain, and all that, but you don't own it! I know what you're up to. You haven't got it in you to make the top yourself, so you don't want anyone else to get the glory. That's it, isn't it? Isn't it?" He sat down again suddenly, gasping for breath.

Nace looked at him with level eyes. "This mountain has licked me five times," he said softly. "It killed my best friend. It means more to me to lick it than anything else in the world. Maybe I'll make it and maybe I won't. But if I do, it will be as a rational, intelligent human being, not as a damned fool throwing my life away—"

He collapsed into another fit of coughing and fell back in his sleeping bag. Osborn, too, was still. They lay there inert, panting, too exhausted for speech.

It was hours later that I awoke from dull, uneasy sleep. In the faint light I saw Nace fumbling with the flap of the tent.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Osborn. He's gone."

The words cut like a blade through my lethargy. I struggled to my feet and followed Nace from the tent.

Outside, the dawn was seeping up the eastern sky. It was very cold, but the wind had fallen and the mountain seemed to hang suspended in a vast stillness. Above us the summit pyramid climbed bleakly into space, like the last outpost of a spent and lifeless planet. Raising my binoculars, I swept them over the grey waste. At first I saw nothing but rock and ice; then, suddenly, something moved.

"I've got him," I whispered.

As I spoke, the figure of Osborn sprang into clear focus against a patch of ice. He took three or four slow upward steps, stopped, went on again. I handed the glasses to Nace.

The Englishman squinted through them a moment, returned them to me and re-entered the tent. When I followed, he had already laced his boots and was pulling on his outer gloves.

"He's not far," he said. "Can't have been gone more than half an hour." He seized his ice axe and started out again.

"Wait," I said. "I'm going with you."

Nace shook his head. "Better stay here."

"I'm going with you," I said.

He said nothing further, but waited while I made ready. In a few moments we left the tent, roped up and started off.

Almost immediately we were on the shoulder and confronted with the paralyzing two-mile drop of the north face, but we negotiated the short exposed stretch without mishap and in ten minutes were working up the base of the summit pyramid. Our progress was creepingly slow. There seemed to be literally no air at all to breathe, and after almost every step we were forced to rest.

The minutes crawled into hours, and still we climbed. Presently the sun came up. Its level rays streamed across the clouds far below, and glinted from the summits of distant peaks. But, although the pinnacle of K3 soared a full five thousand feet above anything in the surrounding world, we had scarcely any sense of height. The stupendous wilderness of mountains and glaciers that spread beneath us to the horizon was flattened and remote, an unreal, insubstantial landscape seen in a dream. We had no connection with it, or it with us. All living, all awareness, purpose and will were concentrated in the last step and the next—to put one foot before the other; to breathe; to ascend. We struggled on in silence.

I do not know how long it was since we had left the camp—it might have been two hours, it might have been six—when we suddenly sighted Osborn. We had not been able to find him again since our first glimpse through the binoculars, but now, unexpectedly and abruptly, as we came up over a jagged outcropping of rock, there he was. He was at a point, only a few yards

above us, where the mountain steepened into an almost vertical wall. The smooth surface directly in front of him was obviously unclimbable, but two alternate routes were presented. To the left, a chimney cut obliquely across the wall, forbiddingly steep, but seeming to offer adequate holds. To the right was a gentle slope of snow that curved upward and out of sight behind the rocks. As we watched, Osborn ascended to the edge of the snow, stopped and tested it with his foot; then, apparently satisfied that it would bear his weight, he stepped out on the slope.

I felt Nace's body tense. "Paul!" he cried out.

His voice was too weak and hoarse to carry. Osborn continued his ascent.

Nace cupped his hands and called his name again, and this time Osborn turned. "Wait!" cried the Englishman.

Osborn stood still, watching us, as we struggled up the few yards to the edge of the snow slope. Nace's breath came in shuddering gasps, but he climbed faster than I had ever seen him climb before.

"Come back!" he called. "Come off the snow!"

"It's all right! The crust is firm!" Osborn called back.

"But it's melting! There's," Nace paused, fighting for air, "there's nothing underneath!"

In a sudden, horrifying flash I saw what he meant. Looked at from directly below, at the point where Osborn had come to it, the slope on which he stood appeared as a harmless covering of snow over the rocks. From where we were now, however, a little to one side, it could be seen that it was in reality no covering at all, but merely a cornice or unsupported platform clinging to the side of the mountain. Below it was not rock, but ten thousand feet of blue air.

"Come back!" I cried. "Come back!"

Osborn hesitated, then took a downward step. But he never took the next. For in that same instant the snow directly in front of him disappeared. It did not seem to fall or to break away. It was just soundlessly and magically no longer there. In the spot where Osborn had been about to set his foot there was now revealed the abysmal drop of the north face of K3.

I shut my eyes, but only for a second, and when I reopened them Osborn was still, miraculously, there.

Nace was shouting, "Don't move! Don't move an inch!"

"The rope," I heard myself saying.

The Englishman shook his head. "We'd have to throw it, and the impact would be too much. Brace yourself and play it out." As he spoke, his eyes were travelling over the rocks that bordered the snow bridge. Then he moved forward.

I wedged myself into a cleft in the wall and let out the rope which extended between us. A few yards away, Osborn stood in the snow, transfixed, one foot a little in front of the other. But my eyes now were on Nace. Cautiously, but with astonishing rapidity, he edged along the rocks beside the cornice. There was a moment when his only support was an inch-wide ledge beneath his feet, another when there was nothing under his feet at all and he supported himself wholly by his elbows and hands. But he advanced steadily, and at last reached a shelf wide enough for him to turn around on. At this point he was perhaps six feet away from Osborn.

" It's wide enough here to hold both of us," he said in a quiet voice. " I'm going to reach out my axe. Don't move until you're sure you have a grip on it. When I pull, jump."

He searched the wall behind him and found a hold for his left hand. Then he slowly extended his ice axe, head foremost, until it was within two feet of Osborn's shoulder.

" Grip it ! " he cried suddenly. Osborn's hands shot out and seized the axe. " Jump ! "

There was a flash of steel in the sunlight and a hunched figure hurtled inward from the snow to the ledge. Simultaneously another figure hurtled out. The haft of the axe jerked suddenly from Nace's hand, and he lurched forward and downward. A violent, sickening spasm convulsed my body as the rope went taut. Then it was gone. Nace did not seem to hit the snow ; he simply disappeared through it, soundlessly. In the same instant the snow itself was gone. The frayed, yellow end of broken rope spun lazily in space.

Somehow my eyes went to Osborn. He was crouched on the ledge where Nace had been a moment before, staring dully at the axe he held in his hands. Beyond his head, not two hundred feet above, the white, untrodden pinnacle of K3 stabbed the sky.

Perhaps ten minutes passed, perhaps half an hour. I closed my eyes and leaned forward motionless against the rock, my face against my arm. I neither thought nor felt ; my body and mind alike were enveloped in a suffocating numbness. Through it at last came the sound of Osborn moving. Looking up, I saw he was standing beside me.

" I'm going to try to make the top," he said tonelessly.

I merely stared at him.

" Will you come ? "

I shook my head slowly. Osborn hesitated a moment, then turned and began slowly climbing the steep chimney above us. Halfway up he paused, struggling for breath. Then he resumed

his laborious upward progress and presently disappeared beyond the crest.

I stayed where I was, and the hours passed. The sun reached its zenith above the peak and sloped away behind it. And at last I heard above me the sound of Osborn returning. As I looked up, his figure appeared at the top of the chimney and began the descent. His clothing was in tatters, and I could tell from his movements that only the thin flame of his will stood between him and collapse. In another few minutes he was standing beside me.

"Did you get there?" I asked.

He shook his head slowly. "I couldn't make it," he answered. "I didn't have what it takes."

We roped together silently and began the descent to the camp.

There is nothing more to be told of the sixth assault on K3—at least not from the experiences of the men who made it. Osborn and I reached Camp V in safety, and three days later the entire expedition gathered at the advance base. It was decided, in view of the appalling tragedy that had occurred, to make no further attempt on the summit, and we began the evacuation of the mountain.

It remained for another year and other men to reveal the epilogue.

The summer following our attempt a combined English-Swiss expedition stormed the peak successfully. After weeks of hardship and struggle, they attained the topmost pinnacle of the giant, only to find that what should have been their great moment of triumph was, instead, a moment of the bitterest disappointment. For when they came out at last upon the summit, they saw that they were not the first. An axe stood there. Its haft was embedded in rock and ice, and on its steel head were engraved the words: TO MARTIN FROM JOHN.

* * *

## *STAND-IN*

An actress thought she had hit on an excellent plan for keeping her diamond necklace safe. She always left it on the dressing-table with a note: "This is only an imitation. The real necklace is kept at the bank."

But one night she found it gone, and in its place this note: "This necklace will do, thanks. I'm only a substitute myself. The burglar who looks after this district is on holiday."

★*The emotions of June, 1944, have nowhere, perhaps, found more telling words than in this fragment by a young bomber pilot from Colorado, who was one of America's most promising short story writers. Instead of returning home when his tour was completed he transferred to fighter aircraft. He was twenty-three when he was killed on an escort operation.*

# WAITING FOR ENGLAND

## by BERT STILES

THE Fortresses took off in the late afternoon and flew by wings to the west of England and turned south. Out of sight to the north-east there was fighting on the beaches, and many dead men lay in the surf. But the Forts were high above all that. Since the first day, the sixth of June, their job had been easy. Today the target was an airfield on the Brest Peninsula, not so far from Lorient, where the Forts used to go in the old days.

He flew it when it was his turn, and watched the sun slide down through the soft blue towards the sea. When it was time to bomb, the field was already a smoky mess from the wings up ahead. The flak started shortly after bombs away. The first four puffs were just outside the window. He could see the dull flash as the shells burst. The formation leader banked steeply right. The flak tracked along easily.

There was an ugly clank underneath somewhere. He knew they were hit. Engines O.K. Instruments reading true. Everything O.K. The helpless fear of those soft black puffs tightened inside him. It was always the same. Nothing to do but sit there and pray the luck holds. And then they were out of it, turning towards home. "Ball-turret to pilot," came over the interphone. "We got holes in the gut."

Once you're out of it, flak never seems quite real, till the next time. The formations churn through the quiet sky, and the earth is a million miles below.

The formations let down into the darkening east. He leaned forward waiting for England.

England. He said it in his mind, and then slowly in his mouth, without moving his lips.

When he was eight years old he read *Robin Hood* for the first time.

After that he must have read it twenty more. Sherwood Forest and Nottingham Town in the days of Richard the Lionhearted. He'd dreamed of it then, waiting for the day when he would stand at the rail of a ship, waiting for England to come out of the sea, out of the haze. Almost like now.

But it wasn't the same. Because now, for a little while, England was home, more home than Colorado.

After the ride to Munich he thought that the island had sunk into the sea and France had somehow stretched and spread on north to the pole.

After Kiel, letting down over the North Sea, he had said a funny knocked-out prayer. *Be there, island. Please be there. Be there soon.* After Berlin, after the soft acres of death above the shattered town, nothing had ever looked so good as the dim line of surf a half-hour ahead.

It slipped in gently, as always, clean and friendly and far off. That would be Land's End, Cornwall, and Devon. The names ring. He could sit with a map and say the names out loud, and never get tired of the sound of them . . . Torquay, Nutt Corner, Coventry, and Charing Cross.

The Forts hit the coast at 8,000 feet. A flight of Spitfires was playing in the clouds at three o'clock low.

A guy named Mitchell lay on a cliff above the sea and watched the gulls, and dreamed the Spitfires. And a guy named Leslie Howard, who was Mitchell for a couple of hours' worth of movie, crashed back there somewhere coming back from Lisbon, probably leaning forward waiting for England to show through the dusk.

Strange, how any land could be so many shades of green, with the lazy netting of the lanes that wandered everywhere to nowhere. When he looked down there war was just a word, without meaning. It looked so peacefully lovely, yet the people who lived there had fought since the beginning of time, since long before the Romans. And they were still fighting.

He flew his turn for a while, taking it easy, not trying to squeeze the lead ship any. He was glad when the pilot took over again. It was better just to look.

Airfields and towns and churches and hedges, more airfields and ponds and brooks, and cows. More airfields and roads and train tracks and radio towers.

He tried to imagine it as it must have been once, long before William the Conqueror, when King Lear was wandering mad on the heath. He couldn't bring it through. He couldn't believe it had ever been wild. Everything looked permanent, steady till the end of time.

He was so tired of sitting, he wanted to bale out. Yet he would

have liked to fly on for hours, up to the lands of the Scotsmen. Stornoway, Inverness, and the Isle of Skye.

Two Lancasters were landing on the east-west runway. A flight of P–51s came over the top from nine o'clock. Night was slipping over the world from the east, but there was still day back at six o'clock.

Though it was not his land, and although he had only lived there a little while, he thought he knew why these quiet Englishmen raised so much hell with anyone who tried to take over.

He was tired, saggy tired, starting at the knees on up to the eyes. But he felt good, just glad to be there; it was just so goddamn good to be there, there were no words to tell it.

It was almost dark then, and the stars were coming through.

* * *

## *ADLESTROP*

*Yes. I remember Adlestrop—*
*The name, because one afternoon*
*Of heat the express-train drew up there*
*Unwontedly. It was late June.*

*The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.*
*No one left and no one came*
*On the bare platform. What I saw*
*Was Adlestrop—only the name*

*And willows, willow-herb, and grass,*
*And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,*
*No whit less still and lonely fair*
*Than the high cloudlets in the sky.*

*And for that minute a blackbird sang*
*Close by, and round him, mistier,*
*Farther and farther, all the birds*
*Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.*

EDWARD THOMAS

# PASTURES NEW

**Variety, that is my motto**

LA FONTAINE, *Fables*

Tryed one woman and did not like her I was to try another shortly and if I found her answer the description I intended to attack her very briskly and reduce her by storm.

REV. JOHN THOMLINSON, *Diary, May 1st*, 1718

## *The Myrie Lyf*

*This Absolon, that jolif was and gay,*
*Gooth with a sencer on the haliday,*
*Sensynge the wyves of the parisshe faste ;*
*And many a lovely look on hem he caste,*
*And namely on this carpenteris wyf.*
*To looke on hire hym thoughte a myrie lyf,*
*She was so propre and sweete and likerous . . .*

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *The Miller's Tale*

## *Equilibrium*

Not long after anchoring several boats came off ; and from one of them stepped a neatly-dressed and very respectable-looking woman, some thirty years of age, I should think, carrying a bundle. Coming forward among the sailors, she inquired for Max the Dutchman, who immediately was forthcoming, and saluted her by the mellifluous appellation of *Sally*.

Now during the passage, Max in discoursing to me of Liverpool, had often assured me that that city had the honour of containing a spouse of his ; and that in all probability, I would have the pleasure of seeing her. But having heard a good many stories about the bigamies of seamen, and their having wives and sweethearts in every port, the round world over ; and having been an eye-witness to a nuptial parting between this very Max and a lady in New York, I put down this relation of his for what I thought it might reasonably be worth. What was my astonishment, therefore, to see this really decent, civil woman coming with a neat parcel of Max's shore clothes, all washed, plaited, and ironed, and ready to put on at a moment's warning.

They stood apart a few minutes giving loose to those transports of pleasure which always take place, I suppose, between man and wife after long separations.

At last, after many earnest inquiries as to how he had behaved himself in New York; and concerning the state of his wardrobe; and going down into the forecastle, and inspecting it in person, Sally departed, having exchanged her bundle of clean clothes for a bundle of soiled ones; and this was precisely what the New York wife had done for Max, not thirty days previous.

So long as we laid in port, Sally visited the *Highlander* daily; and approved herself a neat and expeditious getter-up of duck frocks and trowsers, a capital tailoress, and so far as I could see, a very well-behaved, discreet, and reputable woman.

But from all I had seen of her, I should suppose Meg, the New York wife, to have been equally well-behaved, discreet, and reputable; and equally devoted to keeping in good order Max's wardrobe.

And when we left England at last, Sally bade Max good-bye, just as Meg had done; and when we arrived in New York, Meg greeted Max precisely as Sally had greeted him in Liverpool. Indeed, a pair of more amiable wives never belonged to one man . . . For many years he had been . . . plying between wife and wife with great regularity, and sure of receiving a hearty domestic welcome on either side of the ocean.

HERMAN MELVILLE, *Redburn*

## *How Happy A Thing*

*How happy a thing were a wedding,*
*And a bedding,*
*If a man might purchase a wife*
*For a twelvemonth and a day . . .*

THOMAS FLATMAN, 1637-1688

## *The Old Adam*

He had a daughter, a modest gentlewoman, and very well brought up, whom he gave in mariadge to one Mr. Adam Squyre, a minister and preacher, and learned, but a very fantasticall man, as appeared partly the first day; for as I have heard, he would needes preach at his own mariadge, upon this text; "It is not good for *Adam* to be alone." This text he so pursued, after he had been some years married, that though his wife were away, yet Adam would not be *alone*. This course bred jelosie, jarrs and complaynts.

SIR JOHN HARINGTON,
*A Briefe View of the State of the Church of England*

## *Tom-Cat*

I had a name once, a short, furry name, a Persian Angora's name. But I left it on the roofs, in the gurgling hollow of the gutters, and on the rubbed moss of the old walls. I am the tom-cat . . .

Now is the wild season of love, which blinds us to all other joys, and by some black magic multiplies the lean females in the gardens. Impossible to choose between this one, white and thin, that one blazing like a brown and orange tulip, and the other, black and gleaming like a wet eel. Alas, I want all of them, this, that, and the other! If I don't subdue them, my rivals will take them. Already I cease to hear the sob of this one who is enduring my cruel embrace. I am listening to a voice which reaches me over the roofs and across the winds, the voice of the she-cat who is calling me, and whom I don't know.

How beautiful she is, that far-away beloved, invisible and groaning with desire! Surround her with walls, keep her from me as long as you will, let her scent and her voice alone possess me! Alas, for me there is no such thing as an inaccessible lover, and this one too will leap over the walls to join me . . .

The nights of love are long. I remain at my post, ready for action, punctual and morose. The little wife I have deserted sleeps in her house. She is blue and gentle and looks too much like me. Lying in the depths of her scented bed, is she listening to the cries that rise up to me? And when the struggle is at its height, does she hear my beast-name roared out by some wounded male, that name of mine which no man has heard?

Yes, this night of love is long drawn out . . . For many years now I have reigned and loved and killed; and I have been beautiful for a very long time. Rolled in a ball on the wall icy with dew, I dream . . . I am afraid of looking old.

COLETTE, *Creatures Great and Small,*
*translated by* ENID MCLEOD

## *Inconstant Nymph*

*O, were you on the mountain, or saw you my love?*
*Or saw you my own one, my queen and my dove?*
*Or saw you the maiden with the step firm and free?*
*And say, is she pining in sorrow like me?*

*I was upon the mountain, and saw there your love,*
*I saw there your own one, your queen and your dove;*
*I saw there the maiden with step firm and free,*
*And she was* not *pining in sorrow like thee.*

DOUGLAS HYDE

# MY ONLY INDIAN

## "A nice character," my uncle said, "primitive and childlike"

## by ROBERT FONTAINE

MY first and only Indian was a half-breed with two black braids and a motor-cycle. According to my fat and rosy Uncle Louis who befriended this Indian, he had picked up the motor-cycle in a junk yard. I, myself, think the Indian stole it.

It did not matter very much, because the Indian could not ride the motor-cycle decently anyway. The first time I met him, the day Uncle Louis brought him home and flabbergasted my mother and father, the Indian offered to take me for a ride. I sat on the back and the Indian started the motor-cycle and we drove all over everybody's lawn and on the wrong side of the street until the Indian finally found out how to stop it.

My Uncle Louis made him forget about the motor-cycle and put it in the cellar.

The way my uncle happened to meet the Indian was that my uncle was coming out of a drinking club when he saw this poor Indian standing on the pavement looking homeless and thirsty, so my uncle, who was a gregarious person, invited the Indian into the club and after a few bottles of wine they were close friends and my uncle was determined to do something for the Indian.

It took my father and mother about four hours to get over the shock of seeing Uncle Louis and an Indian sleeping on the divan. Uncle Louis had come to live with us as a definitely non-paying boarder, and his own fat, lazy presence was enough, in my parents' opinion, without adding a moth-eaten Indian.

After a while, however, and mainly because I felt very proud to have an Indian, it being better than a bicycle in the class I travelled with, my parents said the Indian could pitch my Scout tent in the back yard and live there awhile until he found work.

The second day of the Indian, my uncle took him aside and suggested they find some work for him.

The Indian shook his head. "No work," he said flatly. "Hunt, fish, shoot, chase squaw. No work."

"My friend," my uncle said, "you cannot hunt and fish in the city. You must work." The Indian shrugged.

We took him to a large department store where Mr. McGoffern, my Sunday-school teacher, was manager. My uncle said, " Can you use an Indian elevator operator ? "

" Can he run an elevator ? " Mr. McGoffern asked suspiciously.

" He can ride a motor-cycle," I said quickly.

" I believe people would be a little alarmed at a man with a pigtail and feathers in his hair running an elevator," Mr. McGoffern said helplessly.

They went over to the elevator, however, and when it was clear, Mr. McGoffern explained how the elevator was worked and the Indian got in and we closed the door. The elevator shot up and then down and then up and then down. It did everything but go sideways. Mr. McGoffern finally stopped it and said, " I don't think he's got it in him."

" They are," my uncle defended, " a childlike, primitive people with a heart of gold. They love animals and children."

" Papooses," I said.

Mr. McGoffern excused himself, saying he was busy.

Uncle Louis told the Indian the white man was a greedy and frightened creature. The Indian nodded.

We went to the Casino Theatre where my father played the violin in the orchestra, and my uncle and the Indian left me downstairs in the dressing rooms while they went next door to a drinking club to wash their hands, as they put it. When they came back they were very happy and hopeful. The Indian was dancing round Uncle Louis and making wow-wow sounds with his mouth and hand.

The manager, M. Piastra, came down and took one look at the Indian and demanded to know what was going on. My uncle pleaded with M. Piastra to hire the Indian as a doorman. " Consider the novelty of an Indian doorman. We will array him in complete feathers."

Piastra looked at the Indian and his braids and the few feathers in his head and the skimpy little pants he had on and the paint on his bare chest and told us all to get out.

There were some dogs and some seals who were playing on the stage and when they saw the Indian they began barking frightfully.

We all went out into the street and my uncle and the Indian made me wait again while they went into a drinking club for some iced water. This time when they came out they were both dancing around and making Indian sounds, my fat uncle looking very funny hopping up and down and going wow-wow !

Our next stop was the baseball field at Lansdowne Park.

My uncle knew the manager as they both belonged to the same drinking clubs. " Imagine to yourself," said my uncle, " an

Indian in complete feathers playing second base!"

The manager, M. LaMer, snorted. "Where does he come from, this savage?"

"Up the Gatineau. He strayed into civilization. We must show him kindness and consideration. We have taken his people's land from them and with it their happiness. He is primitive and childlike but filled with love for animals and children."

Unaccountably the Indian began to dance around and my uncle, intrigued, joined in.

"I must be seeing things," M. LaMer said.

The Indian and my uncle stopped dancing and my uncle asked M. LaMer point-blank if he would not give the Indian a job. The baseball manager shook his head. "He does not belong here, this Indian. He is too primitive and childlike and, if you ask me, full of wine at the moment."

"Ah, but who isn't?" my uncle said genially, putting his arm round the Indian.

We tried many other places but there was no position whatever in the whole great city for a childlike and primitive Indian who loved animals and children.

"No work," the Indian said happily. "Hunt, fish, chase squaw. But no work."

"See how primitive he is," my uncle said proudly.

"I see," I said.

"There is one more chance to give him the benefits of civilization," said my uncle. "The Widow Dubois."

I shuddered. "That old witch."

"She is rich beyond dreams," my uncle said.

"She is ugly as an old tree."

"To an Indian," my uncle asserted, "she might be beautiful."

They stopped, again leaving me outside, and combed their hair. They must have become very refreshed in the last club because they were dancing and chanting the whole way to the widow's. When they got there Uncle Louis made the Indian be quiet. "Nice squaw," he informed him. The Indian let out a joyful but blood-curdling yell.

In a moment the widow opened the door and smiled happily at Uncle Louis and then regarded the Indian with what must have been admiration. "Come in, my friend," she said. "Come in. Some wine, perhaps?"

"But, yes," said my uncle, whispering to the Indian, "Fire water."

"What's that?" the Indian asked.

"A fine Indian," I muttered. I was beginning to get quite

tired. The widow brought in some wine and they drank and talked. The ugly old widow simply could not keep her eyes off the Indian's brown bare chest. "They look so much more primitive without shirts," she said, smiling hopefully.

"Childlike, also," my uncle said.

"Do you like children?" the widow asked the Indian.

"Like," he said.

"Do you like animals?"

"Like," replied the Indian.

"Do you need an Indian gardener? If necessary we can fit him with full feathers," my uncle said, winking at the widow.

"No work," said the Indian.

"Shut up," said my uncle. "This kind of work will be a pleasure, eh, Mme. Dubois?"

"But yes," she said, staring at the Indian.

"Nice squaw," the Indian said to my uncle solemnly. "Do wash, clean, make food, all right. Stay here."

"There you are," my uncle said happily.

"The garden certainly needs tending and in the winter there is always the snow. I happen to have an extra bedroom, too."

"He sleeps on the floor," I said.

"Well," my uncle said to the Indian, "I will leave you here. Good food, Good squaw. Good bed. Plenty wampum."

"What's that?" the Indian asked. Mme. Dubois laughed. "So primitive!"

"My commission," said my uncle, "will be ten dollars a week as long as he stays. If he runs away the payment stops."

"No run," the Indian said. "Like squaw."

"If you get married I will expect a reasonable gift," my uncle observed. Mme. Dubois giggled. "Have no fear," she replied. "And I hope you'll come and join the tribal dance."

My uncle shook hands with the Indian and said he was the finest specimen of the race he had ever encountered and hoped he would be very comfortable and happy.

When we both started for home my uncle said, "A nice character, primitive and childlike."

"Mme. Dubois," I observed, "has no garden."

My uncle slapped the side of my head. "You have learned to talk," he said, "but not to keep your mouth shut."

Then he relented and while he went into a drinking club to cool off he sent me ahead to a store for a strawberry ice.

* * *

*Incorruptibility is the fetish of the half-civilized.*

NORMAN DOUGLAS, *An Almanac*

★*Captain Smith, hot on the trail of the notorious French lugger,* Vengeur, *little thought that the chase would bring him face to face with his half-forgotten rival in love, Charles de Guichen. And with his once-beloved Isabelle, now more bewitching than ever !*

# PRISONER OF FRANCE

## by SHOWELL STYLES

IT is more than probable that Captain Sir Sidney Smith was disappointed when, after his exploit at Toulon, he was not given the command of a ship of the line. Instead, he was appointed to the *Diamond* frigate, 32, and ordered to range the French coast between Calais and Cherbourg, destroying such enemy shipping and supplies as he could reach. He threw himself with all his incomparable zest for hazard into the game, venturing again and again into the enemy harbours and estuaries and leaving a trail of blazing stores and shipping wherever he went.

Intelligence reached Portsmouth, where *Diamond* was refitting, that the famous lugger *Vengeur* was in Havre de Grâce. This was on the 16th of April, 1796, and both Sir Sidney's lieutenants were wounded and in hospital. But by dusk on April 18th the frigate was creeping ghost-like through the night mists towards the Normandy coast. It was rumoured in the mess-decks that Sir Sidney had sworn a mighty oath to bring the *Vengeur* into Portsmouth harbour or perish in the attempt. The big lugger was nearly as sharp a thorn in the side of the English as was the *Diamond* in the side of the French.

The southerly wind had dropped at sundown, and a faint breath from the west moved *Diamond* very slowly, under a rag of sail, through the low-lying mists of the Seine mouth. The sailing-master predicted a freshening westerly before morning, and the prophesy brought a frown to the captain's brow ; the tide would be making, and he would have to tow the lugger out against wind and tide. At one in the morning of the 19th the frigate's anchor cable rumbled dully through the muffled hawsepipe and she lay motionless, like a crouching leopard, invisible in the black night a mile to the west of Le Havre pier.

With the swiftness and silence born of long usage the boats were launched. The mist that served them for cover and deadened even the slight sound of muffled oars delayed them in finding *Vengeur*, and it was three o'clock before they sheered noiselessly

alongside and clambered like night-roving cats up her sides. Captain Smith, with Wright at his heels, ran down to the after cabin and burst open the door.

"*Rendez-vous, Messieurs!*" he called sharply to the four men whose figures loomed dimly in the smoky lamplight.

One of them—the first lieutenant—cried out, tried to stand up, and fell full length on a settee where two others already lay in a drunken stupor. Captain Orbec alone was capable of action, and he took it instantly. Ignoring the cocked pistol in Wright's fist, the stocky Nōrman seaman rose from his chair, hurled himself head first through the open port and fell with a mighty splash into the water.

"By Mahound, he'll win clear!" said Wright, and made to rush up on deck.

Sir Sidney stopped him. "Let him go," said he. "He's a good seaman and will show us sport hereafter."

In which chivalrous sentiment he was nearer the truth than he knew.

They secured the three drunken officers and went on deck. Acting Lieutenant Knight and James Boxer, the master-gunner of the *Diamond*, reported that the main deck was clear, every Frenchman being safely imprisoned below. It remained only to tow the lugger out. Sir Sidney's plan was to wait until half-past four before beginning the tow. Suddenly Wright came running down to the after cabin, his big square face grimly set.

"We're adrift, sir," he said tersely. "Anchor cable's cut."

Sir Sidney was on his feet at once.

"Get the boats towing at once with every hand that can be spared."

"Aye aye, sir."

Wright turned to the door, but was thrust aside by the entry of Captain Orbec, dripping but cheerful, with the gnome-like Boxer prodding him from behind with a cutlass.

"Caught this 'un skulkin' up in the bows, sir," panted the gunner. "Mebbe it was 'im as cut us adrift."

Sir Sidney caressed his chin, staring in mild admiration at the stocky captain.

"*Mes félicitations, M. le capitaine,*" he murmured. "You climbed aboard by the cable, I conceive, and then severed it?"

Captain Orbec grinned at him placidly and said nothing. His little blue eyes were bright with triumph.

"Take him below," rapped Smith. "Mr. Wright, get them towing. Boxer, take two men to the helm."

But Captain Orbec had played a trump card with that cutting of the cable. The *Diamond*'s boats tugged and strained at the lugger

for half an hour, unable to tell whether they were making head against the tide or no. Then the mist lifted from the river, enabling the faint outline of the shore to be made out. The tide had carried them well past Le Havre pier and into the mouth of the Seine. Unless they could move *Vengeur* faster than the ebb-tide ran they were in grave danger of going aground, for there was shoal water under her keel.

She began to move perceptibly to seaward as the ebb increased in strength, but overside the brown water was gurgling past from stern to stem, emptying the estuary as water runs from a bath. Ten minutes later Captain Smith observed two boats full of men putting out from the quays. Simultaneously the lugger grounded, slid forward, and grounded again with a stubborn lurch. The boats jerked at her frantically but without effect. She was stranded.

Captain Smith ordered the exhausted boats' crews back on board and addressed them briefly.

"Well, my lads," said he cheerfully, "we've done our best to run. Now we'll stand and fight. Man the guns, and—Mr. Wright! Hoist the Union Flag, if you please."

A whistle and a thud, followed by a report, told that the French-men had opened fire. Captain Smith raised his voice.

"Mr. Wright! Every man to lie flat, with his cutlass in his hand. We shall shortly receive visitors."

Weary as they were, the men raised a cheer. The three boats were so close now that Captain Smith could see the tricolour cockade in the hat of the officer in the stern of the foremost. He strolled to the quarterdeck rail.

"Stand by all." There was the crunch of wood against wood as the boat on the larboard quarter scraped alongside. "Larboard bulwarks—repel boarders!"

He roared the words, and the *Diamond*'s men rose with a yell.

For sixty seconds the eleven men held the assault of the eighty. Then a French army officer hurled himself over the bulwarks and through the line, to be followed at once by others. The quarter-deck was a devil's dancing-floor of stabbing, slashing couples. Captain Smith, parrying a vicious thrust from the French officer, shouted at the full pitch of his lungs.

"Rally on the mainmast!"

A concerted rush by the English from the quarterdeck drove through to the foot of the mainmast. The French poured unresisted over stern and quarter.

Sir Sidney and his men had done their best. A score or more of the boarders lay in their blood on the deck; five Englishmen were dead or badly wounded. The captain's duty was to the remainder of his party.

"Observe, Messieurs!" he cried, addressing himself to the French officer, who seemed to be in command of the boarders. "You may kill us all, but we shall kill many of you. Do you accept my surrender?"

The French officer stepped forward.

"*J'accepte*," he said between his teeth. "*Votre épée, Monsieur l'incendiaire.*"

Sir Sidney, frowning at this impoliteness, let sword and pistol fall to the deck.

"I beg," he said, "that you will have my wounded attended to."

The Citizen-Commandant of Le Havre wore a smile on his gaunt countenance. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the news of the capture of Captain Sir Sidney Smith and his men had been conveyed to him two hours ago. He waited now for the "English incendiary" to be brought before him for questioning.

Personal hatred can grow from small and divers seeds. Charles Guichen was not the only man of noble blood to take office under the revolutionary government, but he was perhaps the most fanatically zealous of them; the undeniable facts of his birth and blood only made him the more bitter against the enemies of the Republic, chief among which (where the port and Commandant of Havre de Grâce were concerned) was Captain Sir Sidney Smith. But there were other and less obvious reasons why the one-time Comte de Guichen hated this Englishman, whom he had met fourteen years before, with a consuming hatred.

As for Guichen's beautiful wife, Isabelle, it may be that the English captain who had once tried to carry her off was something more in her remembrance than a mere weapon to be used in connubial disputes. Isabelle had not taken kindly to the change from Madame la Comtesse to Citoyenne Guichen. She was loyal to Charles in her fashion, and in spite of their dissensions and her own Royalist sympathies had not left him when he became an active servant of the Republic; but only the influential friends she was able to make in Paris—among them the lovely Creole, Josephine de Beauharnais, now Josephine Bonaparte—made her life tolerable in this land of Equality.

Charles Guichen had long ceased to pay any attention to his wife's caprices. On this particular morning he was thankful that her habit of not rising from her bed before noon would keep her out of the way until his business with Sir Sidney Smith was done. That business, he reflected, would not take long, but it would be pleasant while it lasted.

Heavy footsteps sounded on the stair that communicated with the street; he stalked to the chair behind his desk and sat down,

head bent and eyes lowered. He did not look up as the under-officer and his charge entered. Not until the door had closed and he was alone with the prisoner did he raise his eyes and meet the level glance of Captain Smith.

The Commandant smiled still, and with reason. Sir Sidney was a droll sight. Mud was caked in his hair, and stained his torn blue coat. Blood oozed slowly from a cut on his left temple and the rain had spread it down cheek and jaw so that one side of his face was coated a streaky red. But his regard was mild and calm as ever.

The Commandant allowed himself a few seconds of smiling contemplation of this ragamuffin before he addressed him.

"You are the English incendiary Smith?"

Sir Sidney frowned. "I am, as you very well know, Monsieur, Sir William Sidney Smith, captain of—"

"That will do!" spat Guichen. "Your rank and titles have no meaning here in France. You are Smith, the criminal who has committed unnumbered crimes against the sacred name and body of the Republic."

The prisoner shrugged his muddy shoulders.

"As you will, Monsieur. But were our positions reversed, I hope I should be gentleman enough to refrain from calling you a renegade aristocrat, a traitor to your blood, a—"

"Silence!" snarled Guichen. "I have no time to waste in repartee. I sent for you to tell you that an hour ago a messenger left for Paris, bearing news of your capture and my recommendation that you should be removed there and treated as a common criminal and incendiary. You will be given fair trial."

He paused, watching his prisoner's face intently. Captain Smith remained impassive, though he knew that the words were a death sentence.

"Very well, Monsieur. May I request that my secretary, Mr. Wright, remain with me?"

"We are not barbarians here. He may remain with you," De Guichen bared his teeth in a smile. "We can be generous—even to cowards who burn old women's haystacks by night."

Sir Sidney's arms unfolded themselves swiftly. He took a step forward, and Guichen, half-rising from his chair, reached a trembling hand for the bell that stood on his desk.

"Charles!" The door leading to the living-rooms of the house had opened suddenly; Isabelle Guichen stood there, frowning. "This house is intolerable! Sleep is impossible. I—I—"

Her voice faltered into silence as she recognized the bedraggled man standing before her husband. For the space of a long breath no one spoke in the little room. Sir Sidney, transfixed, returned her steady gaze.

He saw a woman of thirty, almost startlingly beautiful in a loose robe of chiffon that scarcely concealed the fact that she was wearing a nightgown of the sheerest silk. This was not the naughty miss of St. Lucia, it was Eve herself, full-bosomed and wide-eyed, who stood with one white hand drawing her robe about her and her black hair, carelessly tied with a bow of yellow ribbon, streaming in shining coils over one bare shoulder.

Sir Sidney, recovering himself, made her a low bow.

"Madam, your most devoted." He was sufficiently disturbed by the encounter to address her in English. "I protest I'm in no fit state to greet you, but you'll allow me—"

"*Assez!*" rasped Guichen. He stood up and flicked his fingers peremptorily at his wife. "Isabelle, leave this room at once!"

Isabelle did not look at him. Her smile was for Captain Smith—a smile that reminded him of the girl who had kissed him and tricked him under the Caribbean moon long ago.

"But, Charles," she said, in her low, full voice, "it is our old friend Captain Smith—but I must say 'Sir Sidney,' Captain, must I not?—and we must entertain him, until he is exchanged. For it is plain, Sir Sidney, that you have had the ill-luck to be captured—"

Guichen pounded on the table with his fist.

"Have done, woman! You make yourself ridiculous. This pirate—this common incendiary—is caught red-handed. He came here by night to burn Le Havre to the ground—"

"A villainous lie," interjected Sir Sidney deprecatingly.

"—and he goes to Paris for trial as soon as may be. Now return to your chamber, Madame."

Isabelle faced him in silence for a moment, her full lips curled in a contemptuous smile. Then she turned on her heel and was gone in a rustle of chiffon. Guichen turned abruptly and rang the table-bell. The under-officer entered with a promptitude that suggested he had not been far from the keyhole.

"The prisoner will be confined in one of the east wing cells," snapped the Commandant, his voice once again cold and expressionless. "The prisoner Wright will be placed with him. See to it. Now begone."

"Good day to you, M. le Comte," said Sir Sidney politely. "My thanks for your—entertainment."

Charles Guichen made no reply. He sat staring at his desk for a long while when the door had closed. But he did not smile to himself now . . .

Paris in April of the year 1798 was a city of excitement, enthusiasm, and—above all—rumour. Rumour and counter-

rumour flew across the unswept streets where ragged citizens picked over the rubbish heaps; it passed from lip to painted lip in the *salons* where women in diaphanous robes that revealed the jewelled circlets about their thighs flirted with the friends of Barras and his fellow-Directors; it penetrated even to a small room in the prison of the Temple, where it received more prolonged and earnest attention from two imprisoned Englishmen than from any two Frenchmen.

In two long years Sir Sidney Smith and Titus Wright, his secretary, had become past masters in the acquisition and assessing of news. News of England, of the war, of the navy, was what they craved, as starving men crave for food; and like starving men they grasped at every titbit that was presented to them. Not that much of it was reliable—but they had learned where to discount and where to add to each rare item that penetrated the massive walls of the Temple.

Why they were alive at all, why they had been in prison for twenty-four weary months without a trial, neither of them knew. Citizen Lépeaux, once of the Directory but now in disgrace and exile, could have told them; he it was who had been cajoled, by a certain lovely lady of whom he was enamoured, into ordering the transfer of Captain Smith and his servant from the Abbaye prison to the Temple and its comparative comfort, and further ordering their indefinite confinement therein. Events, moving swiftly and excitingly towards the triumph of France over all her enemies, had quickly obliterated the mild sensation occasioned by the capture of "the English incendiary," and left them forgotten by those who had power to send them to the guillotine. The outer waves of the commotion set up by those events had lapped, as it were, against the wall of their prison.

As the Commandant of Le Havre had told Sir Sidney two years before, the Temple prison was reserved for prisoners of note. It had sanitation of a kind, which the Abbaye had not; and it possessed a rarity in the shape of a humane and incorruptible gaoler, one Legros, with whom Sir Sidney had made friends and whom he insisted on treating as an innkeeper, addressing him invariably as "Boniface." This Boniface had allotted the Englishmen the best quarters in the prison, a clean and airy room on the first floor. Its barred window overlooked a small *place* where lime trees grew.

So the spring of 1798 sent its rain and sun into the little *place* outside the Temple prison and the lime trees gladdened the prisoners' eyes with a mist of green shoots when they looked from their barred window at the too-familiar scene.

It was a morning towards the end of April when the evidence

of an activity that greatly concerned them was first perceived by Wright. The big secretary was standing at the window while Sir Sidney busied himself with the carving of an inscription on the door of their cell. As was their custom when one of them was watching the square, Wright reported such observations as he was able to make; trivialities of the slightest, but serving to keep utter *ennui* at bay.

"They're shakin' those curtains in the house on the corner again, sir," he said. "First floor window."

"Moths," returned his master laconically.

"Aye aye, sir."

"Sir," said Wright five minutes later, still at his post by the window, "there's a man keeps walking across the square. Three times he's been. He looks up at the prison, an' stretches his right arm, just as he passes that corner house."

Sir Sidney came to stand beside Wright. Below them in the square a lean rake of a man was pacing slowly. He stopped and consulted a watch, as though he waited for a tardy companion, and as he resumed his pacing he glanced quickly up at the grey stone face of the prison.

"Damme!" said Sir Sidney. "Armand Phélypeaux! So he did get back." He well remembered the young Royalist officer, an exile in England, eagerly discussing his plans for returning to France.

"A friend, sir?" demanded Wright eagerly.

"God knows, Wright. See—there's that arm-signal once more. Acknowledge, man—quickly!"

Their window had only bars for curtain, but Wright's resource did not fail them. He tore from the wall a large mirror. The sun was just beginning to strike through the window, and he sent its reflected ray dancing across the cobblestones of the square to flash into the eyes of the lean man, who had halted outside the house on the corner to look back at the prison. The lean man gave no sign. He glanced at his watch again, thrust it into his pocket impatiently, and went quickly up the steps leading to the door of the house at the corner. The door opened and closed behind him.

The two men kept their eyes fixed on that door. But it was the window above it that provided the next episode. The curtains which Wright had seen shaken were slowly drawn aside. Someone inside the room appeared to be erecting a framework of white sticks against the glass. Wright tumbled to the stratagem at once.

"It's a letter, sir—A!" he cried.

With pent breath they watched, while the invisible occupants of the room—there must be two at least, thought Sir Sidney—formed the sticks into successive letters. *A-M-I-S*, they spelt out slowly, *S-O-Y-E-Z-P-R-E-P-A-R-E-S*. Then came an interval,

and after it the words: *DEMAIN MATIN.* At the captain's order Wright flashed his mirror in acknowledgment. The curtains of the window opposite fluttered once and were drawn together. They watched for five minutes more, but there was no further sign from the house on the corner, nor did they see anyone leave by its door.

"Tomorrow morning!" repeated Wright, his deep voice trembling slightly, his square face lit with new hope. "D'ye think that means a rescue, sir? D'ye think this Phélypeaux means fair by us?"

Sir Sidney took his penknife from his pocket.

"I think," he said, "that I'd best make haste to finish my inscription."

She wore a gown of pale yellow gauze that evening, with a narrow girdle of gold that encircled her figure well above the waist and rose in two golden straps that crossed between her breasts. Paul Barras, that connoisseur of the female form, told himself that Isabelle Guichen was more beautiful than his cast-off mistress who was now the wife of General Bonaparte.

"I wonder, citoyenne," he murmured, the brilliant eyes that redeemed his loose-lipped sallowness fixed upon her, "why you were so desirous of a private conversation with me."

"I wonder, too," laughed Isabelle. Over the tip of the gold-mounted ostrich feather with which she slowly fanned herself her glance challenged him. "You are not very handsome, you know, for so grand a personage. I think perhaps I was weary of the throng out there."

She indicated with her fan the closed double-door of the room, from the farther side of which came the hum of a large crowd and the tinkle of music. The Director was much given to grandiose entertainment in this palace of the Luxembourg which he had made his private residence.

"I've never claimed good looks, citoyenne," he told her confidently. "Power I have desired, and power I have won. Do you not think that power in a man is more attractive to a woman than a handsome face?"

She fluttered her long lashes at him in mock demureness. "I have not had the opportunity of experimenting, citoyen."

Barras leaned forward and took her hand.

"Then why not experiment now—Isabelle?" he questioned, low-voiced.

As his hands reached for her supple waist she slipped away from him.

"You interrupt my studies, citoyen," she told him lightly. "I

admire, with reverence, the chamber from which the Republic is governed. It is here, is it not, that the great Director keeps the instruments of his power ? "

" It is here," he acquiesced gravely, falling in with her mood.

" And in these cupboards and desks "—she waved her fan at them—" are the documents and seals that would send us poor subjects to the guillotine ? "

Barras laughed, not displeased by this oblique flattery of his importance.

" Hardly that. In the cabinet there you would find a dossier or two that would surprise you, perhaps. As for my seals of office, I keep them in the escritoire, which was once Louis Capet's—"

" May I see them ? " Her tone held a playful eagerness, nothing more.

" *Mais certainement*," he smiled.

He flipped a small bunch of keys from his fob and going to the escritoire unlocked it and lowered its flap. In a rack beside an array of drawers and pigeon-holes half a dozen seals hung. Isabelle's quick glance saw that in one of the pigeon-holes a bottle of cognac stood. She pointed to it laughingly as Barras was about to close the flap.

" I see you combine pleasure with your business, citoyen. Won't you invite me to clink glasses with you ? "

" You reproach my hospitality. All my apologies." He took the bottle from the desk. " You would not prefer a milder wine ? "

Isabelle looked at him under her dark lashes.

" If I am to experiment with the attractions of power," she murmured, " I must have something stronger."

Barras, laughing, went to a glass-fronted cabinet and took out two small goblets of Venetian glass. With the cognac bottle in one hand he was a trifle awkward in handling them. Isabelle was at his side at once.

" Let me take the glasses," she insisted.

He gave them to her. As she turned from him to carry them to the divan her back was towards him for a moment ; and in that moment the gold mount of her ostrich-feather fan hovered above one of the goblets. She sat gracefully, a glass in either hand, and Barras, uncorking the cognac, filled them to the brim before placing the bottle on a small table. Isabelle handed one of the glasses to him and patted the divan beside her. The Director sat down and raised his goblet to touch it against hers.

" *A l'Amour, ma belle*," he said, his brilliant eyes upon her, and tossed the drink down his throat.

" *A l'Amour*," she echoed softly, watching him.

Barras set his empty glass on the table and turned eagerly to her.

" And now—" he said, his voice thickening a little.

She felt his hands upon her, his breath hot on her cheek. She yielded for a moment to the pressure of his body. Then, quite suddenly, that pressure became a dead weight. The Director grunted and sagged. He sank forward and sideways until his head rested in her lap. His eyes were closed and he breathed noisily through his mouth.

Isabelle extricated herself and stood up, allowing the unconscious man to recline on the divan. Barras was safe for at least an hour; Colonel Phélypeaux, who had concocted the drug, had personally tested it before it had been cunningly concealed in her fan-handle. Deliberately she poured the liquid from her own glass down Barras' elaborately frilled cravat. Anyone finding him thus could draw their own conclusions. Then she placed the glass on the table and went swiftly to the open escritoire.

The paper she drew from her bosom was already prepared. There was wax in the desk, and the flame of a candle taken from one of the wall branches melted it to affix the little strip of tricolour at the foot of the paper. She chose the most important-looking of the seals and carefully impressed it. Then, with a glance at the stertorously breathing Director, she pushed the paper into the bosom of her gown and went to the door.

Five minutes later a somewhat shabby *fiacre*, drawn by a half-starved horse, drew up at the portals of the Luxembourg in response to a doorkeeper's whistle. Isabelle Guichen, cloaked and hooded, hurried out and was handed into the vehicle by the gaunt *cocher*. The *fiacre* rattled away into the night. It drew up before a little house in the rue du Cherche-Midi, and its passenger was out before the driver had descended from his box.

"Well?" she demanded eagerly.

"Well enough," returned Armand Phélypeaux. "Frenel and I sent our message this morning. They received it. And you?"

"I have his seal. It was not—too difficult."

The man put out a hand and touched her arm.

"You run great risks for him, Isabelle," he muttered, half resentfully.

"Yours are greater," she returned.

"I count him my friend. I owe him a service."

"And I count him my friend also," she sighed. "Good night, Armand—until tomorrow."

"Until tomorrow," he echoed; and stood watching until the door closed behind her.

Paul Barras, Director of the Republic, was fortunately too befuddled by the after-effects of Colonel Phélypeaux's excellent drug to recall whether he had taken one glass of cognac or a dozen;

he remembered only what Isabelle Guichen's dark eyes had promised. The following morning he was sufficiently recovered to remember something else—his decision to appoint the lady's husband ambassador to the Sublime Porte at Constantinople.

The Director prided himself on acting at once upon his decisions. The message bidding the Commandant of Le Havre to come immediately to Paris was on its way to the Porte de Neuilly and the road to the coast before Sir Sidney Smith and Titus Wright had finished their breakfast of bread and black coffee. This was on the morning of May 1st, and at the same hour a shabby *fiacre* driven this time by a fat man with very sharp eyes and a large tricolour rosette in his lapel, left the rue du Cherche-Midi. It drove to the Luxembourg, where a gaunt gentleman in the uniform of an adjutant of the Civil Guard was waiting impatiently on the pavement. The gaunt gentleman addressed a sharp reprimand to the driver, climbed into the vehicle, and was driven away.

In the prison-room in the Temple the little gaoler, Boniface, was collecting the empty mugs and platters. He made a practice of waiting upon the two English "residents," as he called them, with his own hands.

As soon as he was out of the room Wright hurried to the window and stood peering eagerly down into the square, where the morning sun was already brightening the new green of the lime trees. Captain Smith was at his elbow within five seconds. Never had sunshine seemed so bright as the light that illumined the dingy little square; no beckoning by-way had ever attracted them as did the unseen streets beyond the house at the corner.

The little *place*, tucked away as it was at the rear of the great prison, was a cul-de-sac; but it seemed to the watchers to be even more deserted than usual today.

Then round the corner trundled a shabby *fiacre*. Its driver was unknown to either of them; he was certainly not Armand Phélypeaux. They craned their necks as the *fiacre* passed beneath the window and drew up at the back door of the gaol, but they could catch no glimpse of its occupant. Nevertheless, Sir Sidney felt in his bones that this vehicle had some connection with yesterday's message.

"I did well to finish my inscription last night," he told Wright complacently, and went to admire his work. It consisted of four lines, which the French diarist Millau later saw and noted:

*"Qui a peur du mal*
*A déjà le mal de la peur.*
*Qui espère le bien*
*A déjà le bien de l'espérance."*

The door opened at this moment, admitting a Boniface pale of countenance and unusually perturbed.

"Alas, alas, Sir Smith!" he began without preamble. "I am desolated—yes, desolated! I would not have had this happen for a thousand—for two thousand francs! I know not how to tell you—"

"Come, come, *mon aubergiste*," said the captain with some impatience. "Are we not to hear what all this is about?"

The gaoler, suppressing his emotions, informed him that an officer had come with an order to transfer both English prisoners to the prison of Neuilly.

"And at once, Monsieur. It's like those accursed clerks at the Luxembourg to give me no notice—but Citizen Barras himself sealed the order."

"Then we had better collect our belongings. Wright, my papers and book, if you please—and we will take that piece of soap, too. This new hotel may not be so well furnished as the inn of Monsieur Boniface."

They preceded Boniface down the stone stairway and into his dingy little office. It needed but one glance at the tall officer who waited impatiently there to reassure Sir Sidney that escape, not the guillotine, lay ahead of them. Phélypeaux scarcely looked at him, but curtly reproved the gaoler for being so long in bringing them.

"I bear the Citizen Director's own seal on my order to transfer, as you have seen," he snapped. "You must have heard that Citizen Barras demands instant obedience. These are the two English prisoners?"

"They are, Citizen Adjutant," replied Boniface dismally.

"Adjutant-General is my title. Remember that. Bring your discharge book."

Boniface placed the ledger on the table and opened it. As Phélypeaux bent to sign, the captain was able to see the bold scrawl: "L. Oger, Adjutant-General."

"There you are, Citizen Legros," Phélypeaux rasped, flinging the quill on the table. "The prisoners will travel with me in my *fiacre*. Good day to you."

Boniface made no protest. He looked thoroughly wretched as first Captain Smith and then Wright grasped his hand in farewell, so that the captain's heart smote him. To repay kindness with deception—a deception that would probably mean punishment for their gaoler—offended his chivalrous spirit sorely. But there was no avoiding it. Already they were out in the free sunshine of the May morning and Phélypeaux was ordering them into the *fiacre*.

Once they were clear of the square their rescuer reached a hand to each of them. Sir Sidney gripped in silence. For once his tongue was unready.

"You will be Titus Wright, I think?" Phélypeaux said in English to the big man. "I have heard of you in England. I am Armand Phélypeaux, colonel of Engineers—in the army of Royalists, you understand."

"And damned glad I am to meet you sir, beggin' pardon," beamed Wright. "Sir Sidney's spoke of you. It'll be hard to find thanks for what you've done, sir—"

"It is not yet done," interrupted the colonel. "And it is not I you should thank."

Captain Smith found his voice.

"Damme, my friend, I'll not pass that!" he said with feeling. "You risk your neck in France, you bring off the most impudent fraud I've ever seen, to get us out of an enemy prison—who are we to thank, pray? Your comrade on the box?"

"He deserves thanks," the other replied gravely. "He is M. Frenel, a spy of your government. He it was who rented the house opposite the Temple and assisted me to signal. But it was another person who planned this scheme, who ran great danger to get a thing essential to its success, who persuaded me to undertake my part in it. If we succeed in getting clear—and the gravest difficulties are yet to come—she will deserve all your thanks."

"She?"

"Isabelle de Guichen," said Phélypeaux.

There was silence between the two men for a little. The colonel looked out of the window; but his eyes were on things far away. He recalled his secret landing in France on a mission to the Royalist sympathizers in Paris, his unexpected meeting with Isabelle and her appeal for his help, the weeks of planning together which had taught him that the love he had once had for her was not dead—and that her heart was given to this Englishman.

Captain Smith could not guess what was passing in the other's mind, but the note of deep respect in Phélypeaux's voice as he spoke Isabelle's name struck an answering chord. He was ever obtuse where the emotions of others were concerned; but now some inkling of her feeling for him grew in his mind. She had taken prodigious risk—"great danger"—for his sake. He felt humility and compassion flood his breast, mingling in something that came nearer, perhaps, to love than he knew.

"We are going to her now?" he asked eagerly.

Phélypeaux came out of his reverie with a start.

"No. We decided that she must not join us in Paris. She will await us at Caudébec on the Le Havre road."

He told swiftly of the rendezvous arranged months ago with Admiral Lord Hotham, who now commanded the Channel Fleet. It was for midnight of May 3rd. An English warship was to stand

close in to the coast off Honfleur alert to pick up the returning spy, who was to put off in whatever craft he could find.

"Madame de Guichen must come with us," Smith said. "She cannot stay in France after this."

"We have been very careful," said Phélypeaux slowly, "and I do not think there would be danger to her if she stayed. But I believe she will come—if you approve it."

The *fiacre* began to slow its pace. They had reached the house in the rue du Cherche-Midi.

The few passers-by, dawdling in the sunshine, gave no more than a careless glance at the three as they descended and crossed to the door. Frenel swore at his nag and the *fiacre* rumbled away. Ten minutes later Sir Sidney, very dapper in a black suit that with his thin features (pale from long captivity indoors) gave him the look of a prosperous lawyer, sauntered out into the rue du Cherche-Midi. At his heels came Titus Wright in a manservant's sober garb of drab breeches and short brown coat. They walked to the Pont Notre-Dame, and there encountered Phélypeaux, still in his uniform of Adjutant-General. In the shadow of the great cathedral a neat chaise and pair stood waiting. They climbed in, and were driven towards the Porte de Neuilly. The driver was not Frenel this time, but a Royalist sympathizer who still plied his trade and carried the necessary permit for travel between Paris and the coast.

It was eleven o'clock when the chaise neared the barrier of the Porte de Neuilly—the busiest hour of the day. The barrier, guarded by the somewhat casual soldiers of the Republican Guard, was thronged with market waggons entering or leaving the city, women selling vegetables, pedlars crying their wares, and innumerable children and idlers. Here was the most hazardous obstacle to their escape, for of the three only Colonel Phélypeaux carried a pass, and that was forged.

All three passengers dismounted from the chaise, which waited its turn in the queue of vehicles. Wright threaded the crowd a few yards in front of Sir Sidney and the colonel, who paced side by side apparently engrossed in argument. In this order they approached the sentry at the foot passengers' barrier. Wright was of course stopped, but had no sooner begun to fumble in his pockets for a non-existent pass than Sir Sidney, coming up behind with Phélypeaux, called out impatiently: "I'll answer for the citoyen, you there—I know him." While the sentry hesitated, the colonel, without ceasing his argument with Sir Sidney, showed his pass and marched through with his companion, pushing Wright before them. The sentry shrugged and resumed his examination of those who followed. Beyond the barrier they rejoined the chaise and took the dusty road for Mantes.

Escape was almost an accomplished fact. Forty leagues still lay between them and the sea, but the worst was past. That night they lay at an inn at Bonnières; the next at Duclair, a few kilometres beyond Rouen. Early on the morning of May 3rd they came to Caudebec; and there they found Isabelle.

Caudebec stands in the willows beside the smooth-flowing Seine, its red roofs clustering near to the little bridge that bears the side-road leading to Pont Audemer and the fishing port of Honfleur. The main road from Le Havre to Paris passed contemptuously through this hamlet without sparing it so much as a change-house for horses, but it boasted one inn, small but decently appointed.

A luminous white mist, presaging a hot spring day, lay thick among trees and houses as the chaise clattered up to the door of the inn. Rescuer and rescued entered the little coffee-room together and found her awaiting them there. She wore a riding-dress of dark red velvet that clung to the shapeliness of her, with ruffles of lace at breast and wrists. Her eyes were very bright as she held out both hands to Sir Sidney.

"Welcome, Monsieur my cousin," she greeted him lightly, with a meaning glance towards the maidservant who was laying cups and knives on the table. "It's a dull morning for our ride. We must hope for sunshine later on."

"You've found horses for us, then?" inquired Phélypeaux negligently, stripping off his gloves and tossing them to the deferential innkeeper.

Isabelle nodded. "Sorry beasts three of them are—but they'll serve for a morning's canter . . . What now? Are we invaded, citoyen hôtelier?"

The tramp of marching men, approaching along the road from the west had prompted the question. The innkeeper shrugged.

"We hear that often, citoyenne," he said. "They are troops from Le Havre—the last to go will pass here today, so a sergeant told me." The four in the coffee-room sat down to coffee and hot rolls. The maid hovered near, but her departure to refill the coffee-pot gave Captain Smith a few moments, which he seized upon.

"Madame," he whispered, leaning across the table and covering her hand with his, "I and Wright here would thank you if there were words enough to express our gratitude, and time enough to express it adequately. Perhaps—"

"It sounds, Monsieur," she broke in lightly, "as if you would be talking for a very long while."

"There will be time even for that," he returned, holding her gaze with his own. "For, of course, you will accompany me to England."

The words were formal enough, but there was that in his look which brought warm colour to her cheeks.

The entrance of the servant forbade further private conversation. They did not linger over their *petit déjeuner*. As soon as it was done they passed, laughing and chatting, into the inn yard, where four saddle-horses stood ready with an ostler in charge. One of the horses was a bay, notably more serviceable than the rest, and this, declared Sir Sidney, should be Isabelle's. He was assisting her to mount when there came a warning grunt from Wright.

"More sojers comin', sir," he observed, cocking his ear.

The quick approaching tramp was plain to hear, and with it the irregular hoof-beats of a horse—a mounted officer, it might be.

A sudden exclamation from Isabelle startled them. The bay, pricking his ears at the sound of hooves, had decided it was time to move. He plunged forward, and was through the gate and out on the road before the woman straining at his bridle could gain control.

"Very well," said the colonel calmly. "Mount and follow—but be slow and careless. There must be no rousing of suspicion."

Captain Smith and Wright obeyed. The three emerged upon the highway at a walk, in time to see Isabelle and the bay disappearing into the mists over the bridge on the Honfleur road. She had managed to turn her mount in the right direction, and probably without being seen by the approaching soldiers, for the head of the column was only now beginning to emerge, like an army of ghosts, from the white vapour that hung upon the road.

The horseman—he was in civilian clothes—was seen now to be overtaking the column, not riding with it. He was ahead of it when Phélypeaux began to ride across the road towards the bridge, and not thirty paces away. Sir Sidney, glancing back, recognized him at the very instant he was himself recognized. Charles Guichen—it was he—gave a shout and spurred his horse forward.

"At the gallop!" cried the captain, clapping heels to his mount's flanks.

The three thundered over the bridge together, and away down the winding track. Behind them came a medley of shouts and orders. The Commandant of Le Havre, who was probably known to the officer in command of the column, had evidently persuaded the soldiers of urgency, for a ragged volley was fired. The fugitives were already hidden in the mists and the balls went wide. The figure of Isabelle on the bay horse loomed ahead of them now. Phélypeaux yelled at her to spur. She obeyed instantly and without question, her mount responding so vigorously that he speedily outdistanced the three who galloped after.

There were no more musket-shots, though distant shouting seemed to indicate that a detachment of the soldiers had been

ordered to pursue them. But nearer than those angry disembodied voices in the mist sounded now the beat of hooves behind them; and those hoof-beats were every moment growing louder. The Commandant of Le Havre, though he had ridden six leagues already that morning, was far better mounted then were the four he pursued. If the thought of leaving the track and scattering occurred to Phélypeaux or Sir Sidney, it was speedily dismissed; the byway twisted between wide ditches beyond which the leaden gleam of marshy pools showed through the mist, threatening disaster to a horseman who chose to try a divergence.

"He must come up with us soon!" Sir Sidney cried over his shoulder to the colonel, who was riding in the rear.

"The sooner the better," growled Phélypeaux in reply.

On the word he checked his horse, reined in and swung it broadside-on across the track, and flipped a pistol from his side-pocket. His face was grim. Captain Smith pulled up as quickly as he was able and rode back towards that ominous waiting figure. He was still some yards away when the dim shape of the pursuer hurtled out of the mist. He saw the orange flame spurt from the colonel's pistol, saw the oncoming horse go down in a heap before the steadily aimed shot, saw the rider catapulted from the saddle to pitch in a heap at Phélypeaux's feet.

The colonel was on his knees beside the fallen man by the time Smith reached him. Charles Guichen had been flung head first, striking the stony track with head and shoulder. There was a great gash, bleeding copiously, running from above one eye to the top of his skull, and his right shoulder was clearly dislocated if not more gravely injured.

"Not dead," Phélypeaux said, in answer to the question in the captain's eyes. "Badly hurt."

"You did the only thing possible," muttered Sir Sidney, aware that behind the other's set calm there lurked a certain need for reassurance. "We'd best be on our way. Hark to that!"

Out of the mist had come the trample of feet moving at the double march, no more than a few hundred yards away.

"If this wound's not attended to soon," the colonel said slowly, "Guichen's as good as dead."

As he spoke the bay horse cantered out of the obscurity and pulled up short. Isabelle slid from the saddle.

"What is it?" she demanded. "That shot—" Her glance fell upon the wounded man. "Charles!" she breathed, and sank to her knees beside him. "You—shot him?"

"I shot his horse, Isabelle," Phélypeaux said. "The wound—"

"The wound must be bandaged," she interrupted sharply. "Your handkerchief, Sidney—quickly."

He gave it. Phélypeaux, cocking an ear at the sound of running feet, now ominously near, frowned down at her as she worked deftly at the ugly gash.

"We've no time to spare," he told her rapidly. "Be quick, Madame, and mount."

She answered without looking up. "You must go. I cannot leave him like this."

Phélypeaux ripped out an oath.

"The soldiers will deal with him. He will be safe enough—"

"He will die if he is not properly looked to. I know what I am saying. Go—go, Sidney, for God's sake!"

Captain Smith shook his head. "If you stay, I stay with you. Colonel, will you and Wright ride on?"

Close at hand a voice shouted from the mist and another replied. Isabelle sprang to her feet and gripped Sir Sidney's arm.

"Would you waste all my work for you?" she cried, in an agony of anxiety. "What can you do if you stay? For me, he is my husband. I can tell them some lie or other—but you they'll kill. Oh, mount—mount and ride, my dear!"

While he still stood irresolute, footsteps clattered startlingly close. Out of the vapour the figure of a running soldier emerged. He halted and gave a shout as he saw the group in front of him.

"For my sake, Sidney—go quickly!" she moaned.

He seized her hand and kissed it before turning to throw himself on his horse. Wright and the colonel were already mounted. The soldier unslung his musket and levelled it. Isabelle felt the wind of the bullet passing above her head, but the horsemen were already in motion and it missed. In a moment they had vanished into the fog; the diminishing clatter of hoofs seemed to be drawing the very soul from her after it . . .

"What's this, citoyenne?" demanded the soldier, advancing suspiciously.

Behind him others came running into view. Isabelle rose slowly to her full height. Tears glittered in her eyes, but her voice was steady and imperious.

"The Commandant is seriously hurt by those villains. He must be got to a surgeon immediately—tell your officer."

"Very well, citoyenne. And you?"

"I am—his wife. I shall not leave him," she said.

Perhaps she wondered a little at herself. But love can change the very nature of man or woman, transient though the change may be. And in her sacrifice Isabelle was content.

At Honfleur that night Captain Smith's ancient acquaintance with two fishermen served the fugitives well. A dozen years before,

at the time of the uneasy peace between France and Britain, he had passed some days at Honfleur fishing with the brothers Jean-Marie and Auguste Vassy and sleeping in their hut on the shore. To this same wooden hut Sir Sidney led Phélypeaux and Wright through the fog of that gloomy evening.

The brothers Vassy received these flying foes of the Republic hospitably, and fed them on smoked fish. Like many simple folk, their loyalty to the age-old traditions of friendship was far stronger than their recently born patriotism. They asked no questions, but willingly agreed to put out for some midnight fishing.

The fog which had shrouded the Normandy coast all day was thick upon the water as the heavy boat crept out from shore into absolute blackness. Two hours passed before they located the ship from Lord Hotham's fleet. They were almost upon her before they saw her—a vast wall of timber towering above their heads into the blackness. A hail came down to them from her deck.

"Boat ahoy! What boat's that?"

"*Liberté*," Phélypeaux replied, giving the agreed password. "Captain Sir Sidney Smith is with me."

Startled exclamations could be heard, and hurrying feet on the decks above. A rope ladder clattered down the side. Jean-Marie and Auguste pulled away into the dark as the three clambered up. She was the line-of-battle ship *Argo*, and her captain, Bowen, was vastly delighted with his unexpected guests.

"By God, Sir Sidney," he exclaimed, pumping the other's hand up and down, "this'll tickle 'em in England! Be in all the journals—Mr. Chantrell!" An officer came hurrying. "Sir Sidney and his man to have my cabin. Show 'em below, if you please. Sir Sidney, you'll excuse me—must get this old tub under way."

Captain Smith, with a muttered apology, managed to detach himself from the others as they crossed the deck. And when, half an hour later, Wright searched for him to bring him to his dinner, he found his master standing motionless by the after rail, staring towards the receding coast of France though there was nothing at all to be seen but an impenetrable blackness.

★***His daring escape from France meant more than freedom to Captain Smith—it brought the opportunity to strike another blow at England's enemies. And in next month's ARGOSY readers will discover how the undaunted Captain, in his finest hour, defied the might of Napoleon.***

# NUTH AND THE GNOLES

**He planned what no burglar had ever planned before . . .**

## by LORD DUNSANY

DESPITE the advertisements of rival firms, it is probable that every tradesman knows that nobody in business at the present time has a position equal to that of Mr. Nuth. To those outside the magic circle of business, his name is scarcely known; he does not need to advertise, he is consummate. He is superior even to modern competition, and, whatever claims they boast, his rivals know it.

His terms are moderate—so much cash down when the goods are delivered, so much in blackmail afterwards. He consults your convenience. His skill may be counted upon; I have seen a shadow on a windy night move more noisily than Nuth, for Nuth is a burglar by trade.

Men have been known to stay in country houses and to send a dealer afterwards to bargain for a piece of tapestry that they saw there—some article of furniture, some picture. This is bad taste: but those whose culture is more elegant invariably send Nuth a night or two after their visit. He has a way with tapestry, you would scarcely notice that the edges had been cut. And often when I see some huge, new house full of old furniture and portraits from other ages, I say to myself, "These mouldering chairs, these full-length ancestors and carved mahogany are the produce of the incomparable Nuth."

It may be urged against my use of the word incomparable that in the burglary business the name of Slith stands paramount and alone; and of this I am not ignorant; but Slith is a classic, and lived long ago, and knew nothing at all of modern competition; besides which the surprising nature of his doom has possibly cast a glamour upon Slith that exaggerates in our eyes his undoubted merits.

It must not be thought that I am any friend of Nuth's, on the contrary such politics as I have are on the side of Property; and he needs no words from me, for his position is almost unique in trade, being among the very few that do not need to advertise.

At the time that my story begins Nuth lived in a roomy house in Belgrave Square: in his inimitable way he had made friends with

the caretaker. The place suited Nuth, and, whenever anyone came to inspect it before purchase, the caretaker used to praise the house in the words that Nuth had suggested. "If it wasn't for the drains," she would say, "it's the finest house in London," and when they pounced on this remark and asked questions about the drains, she would answer them that the drains also were good, but not so good as the house.

They did not see Nuth when they went over the rooms, but Nuth was there.

Here in a neat black dress on one spring morning came an old woman whose bonnet was lined with red, asking for Mr. Nuth; and with her came her large and awkward son. Mrs. Eggins, the caretaker, glanced up the street, and then she let them in, and left them to wait in the drawing-room amongst furniture all mysterious with sheets. For a long while they waited, and then there was a smell of pipe-tobacco, and there was Nuth standing quite close to them.

"Lord," said the old woman whose bonnet was lined with red, "you did make me start."

And then she saw by his eyes that that was not the way to speak to Mr. Nuth.

And at last Nuth spoke, and very nervously the old woman explained that her son was a likely lad, and had been in business already but wanted to better himself, and she wanted Mr. Nuth to teach him a livelihood.

First of all Nuth wanted to see a business reference, and when he was shown one from a jeweller with whom he happened to be hand-in-glove, the upshot of it was that he agreed to take young Tonker—for this was the surname of the likely lad—and to make him his apprentice.

And the old woman whose bonnet was lined with red went back to her little cottage in the country, and every evening said to her old man, "Tonker, we must fasten the shutters of a night-time, for Tommy's a burglar now."

The details of the likely lad's apprenticeship I do not propose to give; for those that are in the business know those details already, and those that are in other businesses care only for their own, while men of leisure who have no trade at all would fail to appreciate the gradual degrees by which Tommy Tonker came first to cross bare boards, covered with little obstacles in the dark, without making any sound, and then to go silently up creaky stairs, and then to open doors, and lastly to climb.

Let it suffice that the business prospered greatly, while glowing reports of Tommy Tonker's progress were sent from time to time

to the old woman whose bonnet was lined with red in the laborious handwriting of Nuth. Nuth had given up lessons in writing very early, for he seemed to have some prejudice against forgery, and therefore considered writing a waste of time.

And then there came the transaction with Lord Castlenorman at his Surrey residence. Nuth selected a Saturday night, for it chanced that Saturday was observed as Sabbath in the family of Lord Castlenorman, and by eleven o'clock the whole house was quiet.

Five minutes before midnight Tommy Tonker, instructed by Mr. Nuth, who waited outside, came away with one pocketful of rings and shirt-studs. It was quite a light pocketful, but the jewellers in Paris could not match it without sending specially to Africa, so that Lord Castlenorman had to borrow bone shirt-studs.

Not even rumour whispered the name of Nuth.

Were I to say that this turned his head, there are those to whom the assertion would give pain, for his associates hold that his astute judgment was unaffected by circumstance. I will say, therefore, that it spurred his genius to plan what no burglar had ever planned before. It was nothing less than to burgle the house of the gnoles. And this that abstemious man unfolded to Tonker over a cup of tea.

Had Tonker not been nearly insane with pride over their recent transaction, and had he not been blinded by a veneration for Nuth, he would have—but I cry over spilt milk. He expostulated respectfully: he said he would rather not go: he said it was not fair, he allowed himself to argue; and in the end, one windy October morning with a menace in the air found him and Nuth drawing near to the dreadful wood.

Nuth, by weighing little emeralds against pieces of common rock, had ascertained the probable weight of those house-ornaments that the gnoles are believed to possess in the narrow, lofty house wherein they have dwelt from of old. They decided to steal two emeralds and to carry them between them on a cloak; but if they should be too heavy one must be dropped at once. Nuth warned young Tonker against greed, and explained that the emeralds were worth less than cheese until they were safely away from the dreadful wood.

Everything had been planned, and they walked now in silence.

No track led up to the sinister gloom of the trees, either of men or cattle; not even a poacher had been there snaring elves for over a hundred years. You did not trespass twice in the dells of the gnoles. And, apart from the things that were done there, the trees themselves were a warning, and did not wear the wholesome look of those that we plant ourselves.

The nearest village was some miles away with the backs of all

its houses turned to the wood, and without one window at all facing in that direction. They did not speak of it there, and elsewhere it is unheard of.

Into this wood stepped Nuth and Tommy Tonker. They had no firearms. Tonker had asked for a pistol, but Nuth replied that the sound of a shot "would bring everything down on us," and no more was said about it.

Into the wood they went all day, deeper and deeper. They saw the skeleton of some early Georgian poacher nailed to a door in an oak tree; sometimes they saw a fairy scuttle away from them; once Tonker stepped heavily on a hard, dry stick, after which they both lay still for twenty minutes. And the sunset flared full of omens through the tree trunks, and night fell, and they came by fitful starlight, as Nuth had foreseen, to that lean, high house where the gnoles so secretly dwelt.

All was so silent by that unvalued house that the faded courage of Tonker flickered up, but to Nuth's experienced sense it seemed too silent; and all the while there was that look in the sky that was worse than a spoken doom, so that Nuth, as is often the case when men are in doubt, had leisure to fear the worst. Nevertheless he did not abandon the business, but sent the likely lad with the instruments of his trade by means of the ladder to the old green casement.

And the moment that Tonker touched the withered boards, the silence that, though ominous, was earthly, became unearthly like the touch of a ghoul. And Tonker heard his breath offending against that silence, and his heart was beating like mad drums in a night attack, and a string of one of his sandals went tap-tap on a rung of a ladder, and the leaves of the forest were mute, and the breeze of the night was still; and Tonker prayed that a mouse or a mole might make any noise at all, but not a creature stirred, even Nuth was still.

And then and there, while yet he was undiscovered, the likely lad made up his mind, as he should have done long before, to leave those colossal emeralds where they were and have nothing further to do with the lean, high house of the gnoles, but to quit this sinister wood in the nick of time and retire from business at once and buy a place in the country.

Then he descended softly and beckoned to Nuth. But the gnoles had watched him through knavish holes that they bore in trunks of the trees, and the unearthly silence gave way, as it were with a grace, to the rapid screams of Tonker as they picked him up from behind—screams that came faster and faster until they were incoherent.

And where they took him it is not good to ask, and what they did with him I shall not say.

Nuth looked on for a while from the corner of the house with a mild surprise on his face as he rubbed his chin, for the trick of the holes in the trees was new to him; then he stole nimbly away through the dreadful wood.

"And did they catch Nuth?" you ask me, gentle reader.

"Oh, no my child"—for such a question is childish—"nobody ever catches Nuth."

* * *

## *LOCAL COLOUR*

**"He knew the taverns well in every town," says Chaucer of his Friar. But can you identify these pleasant inns in fiction, the scenes of many an evening's jollification—and intrigue? *Allow one mark for the name of the inn, one for the source* and one for the author, making a possible total of twenty-four.** **The answers are on page 89.**

1. *It was indeed a hospitable tavern which inspired one of its most devoted patrons to demand, "Shall I not take mine ease in mine inn?"*
2. *They sought him here, they sought him there, but they might profitably have made enquiries at this historic inn for the "demmed elusive" aristocrat.*
3. *It was almost a castle in Spain. Do you remember?*
4. *"A house of public entertainment" on the borders of Epping Forest, it carried its sign proudly through what were, in both senses, riotous times.*
5. *Even in Elysium there could be no improvement on the Canary wine dispensed in this poets' pub!*
6. *This inn brought wine and laughter to a certain gay Don Juan, but a broken heart to his abandoned sweetheart.*
7. *On the riverside terrace of this fashionable hotel, an eminent doctor had to decide whether honesty or genius was more worth preserving.*
8. *With the coming of an old sea-captain and a blind man to this "pleasant sittyated grog-shop" began an adventurous voyage for the landlord's son.*

# SWEET THAMES

**That idea of the Picturesque, from the swan just gilded with the sun amidst the shade of a tree over the water**

ALEXANDER POPE

*To thee, my silver-footed Thamesis*
*Nor more shall I reiterate thy Strand,*
*Whereon so many stately structures stand :*
*Nor in the summer's sweeter evenings go*
*To bathe in thee as thousands others do ;*
*Nor more shall I along thy crystal glide*
*In barge with boughs and rushes beautified,*
*With soft, smooth virgins for our chaste disport,*
*To Richmond, Kingston, and to Hampton Court.*

ROBERT HERRICK

## *Sportsman's Paradise*

We pulled up in the backwater, just below Cookham, and had tea ; and, when we were through the lock, it was evening. A stiffish breeze had sprung up—in our favour, for a wonder ; for, as a rule on the river, the wind is always dead against you whatever way you go. . .

*I steered.* There is no more thrilling sensation I know of than sailing . . . The wings of the rushing wind seem to be bearing you onward, you know not where. You are no longer the slow, plodding, puny thing of clay, creeping tortuously upon the ground ; you are part of Nature ! Your heart is throbbing against hers. Her glorious arms are round you.

We had the river to ourselves, except that, far in the distance, we could see a fishing punt, moored in mid-stream, on which three fishermen sat ; and we skimmed over the water, and no one spoke. We seemed like knights of some old legend, sailing across some mystic lake into the unknown realm of twilight, unto the great land of the sunset.

We did not go into the realm of twilight ; we went slap into that punt, where those three old men were fishing. We did not know what had happened at first, because the sail shut out the view, but from the nature of the language, we gathered that we had come into the neighbourhood of human beings, and that they were vexed and discontented.

We had knocked those three old gentlemen off their chairs into a general heap at the bottom of the boat, and they were now slowly and painfully sorting themselves out from each other, and

picking fish off themselves; and as they worked, they cursed us, not with a common cursory curse, but with long carefully-thought-out curses, that embraced the whole of our career, and went into the distant future—good, substantial curses.

Harris told them they ought to be grateful for a little excitement, sitting there fishing all day, and he also said that he was shocked and grieved to hear men their age give way to temper so.

JEROME K. JEROME, *Three Men in a Boat*

## *London River*

*The river sweats*
*Oil and tar*
*The barges drift*
*With the turning tide*
*Red sails*
*Wide*
*To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.*
*The barges wash*
*Drifting logs*
*Down Greenwich reach*
*Past the Isle of Dogs . . .*

T. S. ELIOT, *The Waste Land*

## *Down To The Sea*

Boys are always leaning over London Bridge, as right-minded boys have been leaning these five hundred years and more. Beneath them the Thames, that loved river of ours, swirls and eddies round the piers, sucking at the weathered stone as it runs seawards, out and away.

I looked at the faces of the spellbound office boys. They gazed like gargoyles from the parapet. Most of them were dull and stolid; but you never can tell!

One face only seemed to me to hold the hunger that burns. It belonged to a thin, pale lad who possessed no physical strength, the type that would rather have been Hercules than Homer. He looked out over the water towards Tower Bridge with eyes that were wide—whether with imagination or indigestion I cannot say! What was he thinking, I wondered. Had I asked him he would have said sullenly, "Nothing," and have slouched away, ashamed.

I wondered if he was seeing in Thames water those things that thousands of London boys have seen—argosies and ventures and foreign places, the drive of water past a vessel's bows, leaning sails and small white towns whose palms trees stand with their feet in calm lagoons.

H. V. MORTON, *The Heart of London*

## *A Water Party*

*Let us, as by this verdant bank we float,*
*Search down the marge to find some shady pool*
*Where we may rest awhile and moor our boat,*
*And bathe our tired limbs in the waters cool.*
*Beneath the noonday sun,*
*Swiftly, O river, run !*

*Here is a mirror for Narcissus, see !*
*I cannot sound it, plumbing with my oar.*
*Lay the stern in beneath this bowering tree !*
*Now, stepping on this stump, we are ashore.*
*Guard, Hamadryades,*
*Our clothes laid by your trees . . .*

*If but to-night the sky be clear, the moon*
*Will serve us well, for she is near the full.*
*We shall row safely home ; only too soon,—*
*So pleasant 'tis, whether we float or pull.*
*To guide us through the night,*
*O summer moon, shine bright !*

ROBERT BRIDGES

## *Naiad*

Just as I lifted a corner of the canopy to glimpse if there was a break in the sky, what should I see on the opposite bank but a girl, running fast up-stream, and she with nothing on. The shower passed as quickly as it had come on. Suddenly in mid-stream I saw the head of my sprite, her black hair encrusted with pearls of rain. She was swimming downstream.

" Hallo," she said, " where did you come from ? "

" Been here all night," I replied. " Have you come far yourself ? "

" From below the bend," she said.

" Come aboard," I said, looking as innocent as a lamb.

" I couldn't do that," she replied.

" Why not ? " said I.

" I'm not dressed for the occasion."

" That won't embarrass me," I ventured.

" It might *me*, though."

" Look here," said I, " I've been watching birds, fish, frogs, cows, horses, and rabbits for the past month, and not one of them has worn as much as a pair of pants or a brassière." The poor girl was obviously getting cold, and I was sorry for her. " Come on," I said, " the kettle is boiling over, and I'll make you a fine cup of tea."

ROBERT GIBBINGS, *Sweet Thames Run Softly*

# MAN FOR SALE

## This stake was crazy enough to catch everybody's fancy

## by FRANK O'ROURKE

THE town dozed in dusty silence until late afternoon, scattered gadabouts leaving shallow imprints of their passage before Ferguson's store and the Bighorn bar ; at five-thirty, with the sun's heat gone and shadows crawling from the façades on the west side of Pioneer Street, the town stirred into life. People appeared in the upper town where the score of substantial homes bunched closely together in respectable aloofness ; on lower Pioneer the bars prepared for business, and Big Annie filled her doorway facing the tincan-littered cul-de-sac just off Pioneer, yawning prodigiously and studying the street with shrewd eyes.

In the pleasant stillness Marshal Benton emerged from the gaol office and began his leisurely tour of the street ; and Lea Ferguson came down Pioneer to visit the milliner about a new hat.

On the west side behind the business district, Johnny Cork hung his battered saddle in the stable alley of Herbelsheimer's livery barn and turned into the side shed, walking on soft-boiled eggs and feeling the top of his sandy-haired skull bounce loosely somewhere high above in the sky. He stripped away the blue shirt and dirt-caked pants, tugged worn boots from his tired, burning feet, and crawled wearily into the water trough. He ducked under and then lay back and sluiced himself liberally, washed the dirt and sweat from his bruised, skinny body, cleaned his nose and ears, and closed his eyes for a restful ten minutes in the sun-warmed water.

He remembered the last horse and decided there was a quicker way to make his fortune ; and knew, drying off with a brown-stained sack, that tonight he would lie in his bunk and ask himself for the thousandth time, *How can I get ahead, improve myself?* And the silent walls would offer no solution.

Johnny Cork dressed and walked slowly through the alley to Pioneer, his movement coinciding with Benton's and Lea Ferguson's. Benton paused at the opposite corner, smelling the evening breeze, and saw Johnny Cork come from the alley in time to catch a fleeting glimpse of Lea's skirt as she turned into the milliner's shop.

Johnny Cork felt the old surge of anger, not at Lea, but against the mother who had filled her with false ideas about her life. Her easy living came from the shop, a general store that differed in no way from a hundred others, but Lea could not understand. Johnny Cork saw the bright flash of her skirt, leaving him with the futile anger of inadequacy, and crossed the street to stand beside Benton, slight and youthful against the Marshal's wide, thick bulk. He looked upwards with his quick, old-man's stare of acute knowledge ; and Benton saw the fresh scratch on Johnny's left forearm.

" Will you ever learn ? " Benton asked.

" I caught a devil the last trip," Johnny said. " He rubbed the fence on me."

" The job pays all right," Benton said. " The lumps go with it."

" True," Johnny said, " but I'm sick of it, Mike."

" Time flies," Benton said quietly. " You'll be an old man soon. Is that the trouble ? "

Benton smiled at Johnny Cork, nineteen this summer, handling a man's rough, thankless job for Herbelsheimer, breaking wild stock for sale to the Army at three dollars per head. Johnny had boundless energy.

The day he arrived in the town last winter, penniless and cold, he had asked Benton for a bed in gaol. Within two days Johnny was sweeping out Ferguson's store, candling eggs, unpacking merchandise ; then in the spring hauling hay for Calderson ; and in a few weeks more breaking the wild stock for Herbelsheimer. Johnny hadn't taken a backward step, but he was impatient now, and Benton read this urgent desire plainly in the thin, sun-blackened face, knowing the reasons well, approving one and distrustful of the other.

" That's it," Johnny said. " I'm getting old fast, Mike. How does a man get his start ? "

" Two ways."

" The straight way," Johnny said, " but just as easy as possible."

" I can't tell you," Benton said. " Any idea is good. It might fail, but one leads to another. One day you'll get it, right in your hand."

" Where I stand," Johnny said, " that day looks ten years off. I've got to improve myself."

" Any other reason ? " Benton asked drily.

Johnny flushed and glanced instinctively towards the millinery shop. " Maybe."

" I can offer sound advice in that department," Benton said. " If it's only the money she expects you to make, she's not worth the time. If it's you first, and money second, she'll be easy to convince."

" I'm hoping it's my handsome face," Johnny Cork said sharply. " And then the money."

" Is it ? "

" Mike," Johnny Cork said miserably, " I don't know."

" Me," Benton said soberly, " I'd take Mary Summerhays to ten of Lea."

Johnny shook his head and moved off towards his room at Calderson's house, walking fast in the yellow sunlight. Benton watched him and thought, if they were all like Johnny, he could walk through the town with peace of mind. He wondered if Johnny really cared for Lea Ferguson or was struck with her position in the town. Lea was a scatter-brained little fool, but Johnny couldn't see that. Lea wasn't half the woman Johnny saw, not fit to carry water for Mary Summerhays, and Johnny was blind to the look in Mary's face whenever they met.

Benton sighed and crossed to the Bighorn bar, forgetting personal problems as dusk deepened and business commenced.

Johnny Cork changed to clean clothes and returned to Pioneer for supper, and then stood on the pavement, glancing up the street towards Ferguson's store. That was just as close to Lea as he could get—a look at her father's store. Johnny turned south to the Bighorn, looking for a casual job, and Dick Burnett called immediately from the cash register, " Mulligan's nursing a sore tooth. Will you fill in for two hours ? "

" Two dollars," Johnny Cork said.

" All right," Burnett grinned, " you robber."

Ten minutes later Johnny was drawing beer and washing glasses, exchanging insults with the other bar-tender, watching the men enter and spread across the long room.

Benton arrived with two friends from the South Fork range and smiled in approval. " Another dollar, eh ? "

" Two," Johnny smiled. " I'm skilled labour."

The Bighorn filled slowly and the games broke into steady play as nine o'clock came round ; in the rear, at the battered pool table, the younger men began their nightly game of call shot, flicking the wooden counters on the overhead piano wire. Burnett sat at the high-stake poker game and Benton argued good-naturedly over the drinks with his friends, and finally one said, " All right, let's draw for it."

Johnny watched him break three matches in different lengths, shuffle them, and hold the three, ends on line and uncovered. Benton said, " Short stub pays," and drew. The other man drew, and they both laughed as the game's originator opened his fist and grinned ruefully at the shortest stub.

Benton said, " Always let the other man choose. Thank you, boys."

Benton left the Bighorn, and Johnny Cork stared at the discarded matches thoughtfully. He drew beer and washed glasses until ten o'clock, collected his pay from Burnett when Mulligan returned to duty, and hurried up Pioneer to the gaol office. Benton found him at the desk two hours later, staring sharp-faced into space.

" You ought to be in bed," Benton said mildly.

" I've got an idea," Johnny Cork said. " Let me tell it you, Mike. I began to think about those matches after you left the Bighorn. I thought how everybody likes to take a chance, gamble on something. How many people live in and around town ? "

" Thousand or so in town," Benton said. " Another thousand around. Why ? "

" I've saved two hundred and ten dollars," Johnny said flatly. " I need two thousand to start anything worth-while. I'll be grey-haired before I get that much breaking horses. I thought about those matches, and I got an idea. I'll hold a raffle."

" A raffle ? " Benton said.

" Sell tickets, give a prize."

" No," Benton said. " For a turkey, a horse, a gun—fine. You could net a hundred or two, but never two thousand. And a raffle is only worked once by a man in the same place. The novelty wears off."

" I'll sell tickets at a dollar each," Johnny Cork said stubbornly. " I say I can sell two thousand five hundred tickets."

" And what's the grand prize ? " Benton said. " The bank, the mine, controlling interest in Ferguson's store ? Blow those dreams away, Johnny. What could you offer ? "

Johnny Cork said, " Me."

" You ! "

" I'm the prize," Johnny said quickly. " I'll offer one year of my time, working for the winner free. I'll sell those tickets. Burnett will help, you will, everybody will pitch in. I can live a year on three hundred dollars. I'll finish with a decent stake. I've thought about it every way. Tell me it's a good idea, Mike ! "

Benton said, " I'll be damned ! " and paced the office, slapping one hand against his thigh. Finally he turned and smiled broadly. " I think it'll work. I've never heard anything like it, Johnny. It's crazy enough to catch everybody the right way. I'll get those tickets sold ; Dudgeon will print for you. I'll buy ten to start the ball rolling. There's just one thing—"

" What, Mike ? " Johnny Cork said eagerly.

" What if you can't do the work ? " Benton said. " Or don't like the man who wins you ? "

Johnny Cork said, " I'll do the worrying about that, Mike. See you tomorrow."

When Johnny Cork ran from the office, Benton stared reflectively at the opposite wall. " Raffle himself! Now why didn't I think of that long ago ? "

Johnny Cork worked the next morning in his usual manner, finding tough going on a hammer-headed little horse that hated mankind and all restrictions ; and wondered through the hot afternoon if it was going to come off. Another two weeks and the tickets had to be sold out or the raffle was no good. Johnny Cork worked and sweated, thinking of the day he could say good-bye to the danger of the breaking corral.

The town loafers came in mid-afternoon, grinning and talking about the raffle, lining the corral fence. Johnny went about his business and Herbelsheimer cast angry glances at these idlers who threatened to upset his carefully planned Teutonic routine. They shouted at Johnny and he returned the questions, and finally Herbelsheimer understood. At closing time the fat man walked to the barn with Johnny Cork, looking worried and angry.

" This is true, John ? " Herbelsheimer asked.

" Sure," Johnny said, " but I'm not letting you down, Gus. I'll get another man, don't worry."

" Yes," Herbelsheimer said. " That I know. Men come along. But you, I like you, John. You work hard, do your best. I hate you to try something like this raffle and maybe go *pfitt !* "

" I won't," Johnny said. " When those loafers came down this afternoon, I knew it was started the right way. Are you buying a ticket, Gus ? "

Herbelsheimer shook his head violently. " Nah, John. I don't throw money away."

" Worth a chance," Johnny said. " See you tomorrow, Gus."

Washing and changing clothes, Johnny wondered how many men would think like Herbelsheimer. He could not go back on it now ; the tickets were already being printed. Benton was spreading the news ; the town would be filled with it tonight.

Johnny Cork worried through supper at the café, refused apple pie, and wandered south in the light dusk towards the last buildings along Pioneer. He was hunched on a rock, chin in hands, when Mary Summerhays pulled up her team and light waggon beside him and got down to shake his hand and smile in greeting. She had come to town for a load of supplies, and now she stood before Johnny Cork, brushing at her thick brown hair, standing straight and strong in her man's trousers and work shirt.

" For a raffle prize," Mary said, " you don't look healthy."

Johnny asked, "When did you hear, Mary?"

"From Joe Ferguson," Mary said. "You've stirred up more excitement than a hanging."

"What do you think?" Johnny asked. "Am I crazy or clever?"

"Clever," Mary said firmly. "Sure, I heard those loafers talking, making fun of you, but I know why they talk like that. They're jealous. You're going somewhere and they sit and whittle."

Johnny Cork looked up with gratified relief. "You make me feel a lot better, Mary."

"The tickets will sell," Mary said. "Every one. You'll get the money, Johnny. What then?"

"Haven't thought that far ahead," Johnny said.

"Remember what Dad told you," Mary said. "The real future here is farming, raising stock. You doubted we could grow vegetables. We have. The same thing happened with corn. The piece of land behind us is still vacant, Johnny. Why don't you get it, come out after you work that year, and start farming?"

There was no subtlety in Mary Summerhays; only the honest truth and the plain, clear question in her face.

Johnny Cork said, "I don't know—"

"Not looking for the easy way, are you?"

"Did I say that?" Johnny asked sharply.

"No," Mary said bluntly, "but you're thinking that way. There's no easy way to make good. You're not scared of work, Johnny. The land is good. We'll all help you. There's the best future in this country, better than anything in a town."

"Maybe," Johnny Cork said.

Mary Summerhays flushed slightly and turned to her waggon, climbed onto the seat and gathered the reins. She said, "What's in the town that you call better, Johnny?"

He looked up and felt Mary's strength and affection hold his body for a brief moment; and then he thought of Lea Ferguson's soft white skin and gentle way of life.

He said, "Maybe a thing or two. I could be wrong, but I want to know for sure before I make my move."

"All right," Mary said. "Good luck, Johnny. I'll buy a ticket next time we come to town."

Mary spoke to her team and drove away to the crossroad that led west into the back country where her father and a score of neighbours were farming the rich slopes of the high mountains. Johnny Cork walked back to the night life of Pioneer Street, beyond which the white houses of the upper town stood aloof.

He could enter the Bighorn and be among friends and equals, but he could not walk up Pioneer Street and enter those homes;

not tonight. Maybe two weeks from now, he thought, when he had the money and the big chance. He hesitated outside the Bighorn doors and heard the loud talk within.

Benton was answering a miner from the Red Bluff mine, who said, "Sure, and what would I do with the young scamp if I won him?"

"Take a year off, Brady," Benton said. "He'll do your work while you sit in the shade and collect the wages and grow fat. Is that worth one dollar?"

"You won't be argued down," Brady laughed. "I'll buy a ticket."

"And spread the word," Benton said. "Tomorrow's Saturday. We'll hold the draw two weeks from then. First come, first served."

Johnny Cork wiped his suddenly wet face and moved quickly across the street, up the alley to his room. Benton was going far beyond ordinary friendship, doing all this for Johnny Cork. He slept soundly that night, went about his work the next day, looked vainly for Lea Ferguson after supper while the town filled with a boisterous Saturday-night crowd.

Herbelsheimer came ponderously from the hotel. "I've changed my mind, John. I'm buying a ticket—maybe two."

Herbelsheimer smiled and waddled into the Bighorn, and night came swiftly with piano music and much shouting and the crash of broken bottles along lower Pioneer.

Benton passed a few minutes after nine and said, "Tickets selling fast, Johnny," and went on about his rounds.

Johnny Cork could wait no longer; he entered the Bighorn and made no more than three steps towards the bar before someone roared a welcome, "I feel lucky, Johnny! If I win you, son, all I want is for you to rub my back every night!"

"That I'll do, Red," Johnny Cork laughed. "With a curry-comb."

Bill Calderson turned from a poker game and yelled, "Big Annie has bought twenty tickets, Johnny! What do you think of that?"

"All I can do is pray," Johnny answered, and the laughter rose loud and friendly.

Dick Burnett waited until the noise settled back to normal and leaned over the bar. "Guess how many we sold tonight?"

"I wouldn't know," Johnny said. "I hope plenty, Dick."

"Over three hundred up to now," Burnett said. "We'll get rid of the other two hundred stocked here within three days. Mulligan has just toured the street. Over five hundred sold elsewhere." Burnett chuckled softly. "Everybody's buying tickets, even Ferguson."

"Him?" Johnny Cork said.

"Why not?" Burnett said. "Ferguson is all right, when you get him away from that wife and daughter."

"She's all right," Johnny Cork said curtly. "Not her fault."

Burnett stared impassively at Johnny Cork. "You're no town man, Johnny. You belong to the open country. These towns are all alike. The Fergusons run the stores and rule the roost awhile, then the farmers take over and the Fergusons are dependent on them for all sales.

"Remember that, Johnny. Where do the good strong girls come from to work on upper Pioneer? Off the farms. And they go back and raise their families, and you watch—ten years from now, when this town is settled, Ferguson will stand on his doorstep and bow them inside, happy to get their trade.

"Ask Benton. He knows; so do I. Give me five years more and I'm going west to the foot of the mountains, to my own place. And then I'll look for a big strong girl and hope she'll marry me, and the hell with towns and all these white-faced women who can't carry water from the well."

Johnny Cork said, "You'll eat those words, Dick," and left the Bighorn in a rage of uncertainty that went on through the next day. He slept late and then walked along the river to be alone with his thoughts. Benton had stopped him and given him the total sales for the first night—a thousand and twenty tickets gone, with everything pointing towards a sell-out by next Saturday night.

Johnny sat beneath the willows and stared across the shallow midsummer level of the river; and late that afternoon, thinking of Lea Ferguson, saw her coming from the upper road, carrying an armful of flowers and ferns. Lea waved and waited for Johnny to get up and walk the hundred paces to her side.

"I'm ashamed of you, Johnny," Lea said sharply. "I've never heard of such a thing. Raffle yourself to someone, like a—like a slave. What possessed you to do such a crazy thing?"

"To get my stake, Lea."

"Stake!" Lea sniffed. "How much can you possibly make from such a hare-brained scheme? Johnny, we all had high hopes for you. Now I don't know what to think."

"Give me time," Johnny Cork said. "I'll show you."

"Sell yourself!" Lea said. "For a year! Thank goodness I won't be here to watch you working for some dirty farmer or miner. I'm going to college this fall."

"Where?"

"In Chicago," Lea said. "I couldn't stand another winter here."

Johnny Cork said, " How many years ? "

" I don't really know," Lea said lightly. " Two or three. After that—" She laughed and looked at Johnny coquettishly.

" You'll get married then," Johnny said boldly. " Why waste three years ? "

" For heaven's sake," Lea said. " I'm not throwing myself at the first man who comes along. And certainly not here."

" Not even if the man could support you ? " Johnny said.

" He will have to be a clever man," Lea Ferguson said. " And make a lot of money. And be a gentleman, too . . . Goodness, it's late ! I've got to run ! "

Johnny Cork watched her go, and took his own lonely, thoughtful walk to Pioneer. He remembered Benton's words on the night of the match drawing : " Always let the other man choose."

The week passed swiftly, filled with rumours that raced through the lower town and sneaked discreetly up Pioneer into Ferguson's store and the white houses. Eighteen hundred sold by Friday night ; two thousand three hundred and fifty after Saturday night. Grant Summerhays and the farmers from the west slopes stopped after church on Sunday and bought fifty more tickets, leaving a hundred. When Big Annie heard the news, she called Burnett from the bar and offered to split the final hundred and close the game.

Johnny Cork went to the breaking corral that week, with two thousand five hundred dollars in cash deposited in his name at the bank ; and already Burnett and the other business men on lower Pioneer were preparing for the biggest Saturday night in the town's history. Big Annie ordered a general house-cleaning and bought five cases of wine, and Ferguson received a suspiciously large consignment of merchandise from Omaha.

Johnny Cork was the butt of a hundred jokes that week, bearing them all with a grin and a quick retort. On Saturday afternoon Benton came to the corral and led Johnny aside while Herbelsheimer fretted at this waste of time.

" What are you wearing tonight ? " Benton asked.

" Same clothes," Johnny said. " Why ? "

" Good," Benton said. " Wear your oldest pants and shirt. When I call you, get up on the counter beside me. I'll handle everything. After we make the draw and get the winner, you'd better go home and stay out of sight."

" Good idea," Johnny said.

" And then what ? " Benton asked soberly. " You've got the stake. How about that farm ? "

" Don't know yet," Johnny Cork said.

" Seen Mary Summerhays lately ? "

"Yes."

"She's in love with you," Benton said quietly. "Know that?"

"In love with me!"

"The finest girl in this country," Benton said, "and you can't see her . . . All right, be at the saloon on time; ten o'clock."

Johnny Cork walked to the barn and washed for the last time, collected his pay from Herbelsheimer, shook hands, and went home to rest and wait; as night came on he heard the rising sound roll off Pioneer. Buggies and waggons and riders were pouring into the town, the crowds were thick the full length of the street, finishing their shopping at Ferguson's, moving into the lower street until it was packed in front of the Bighorn. At five minutes to ten Benton arrived, shook hands and called greetings, and stopped on the Bighorn porch to call, "Time for the draw!"

Johnny Cork came from Burnett's office, slipped behind the bar counter, and stood near Burnett, who banged on the nearest barrel and shouted, "Bar's closed for the big draw! Everybody got his ticket handy? All right, Mike!"

Benton mounted the bar counter and raised one hand while Burnett hoisted Johnny Cork up beside him. Johnny stood in his faded shirt and worn pants, grinning at the upturned faces.

Benton shouted, "Can you hear me?"

"Too well!" Bill Calderson answered.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Benton said, with a courtly bow to Big Annie and her girls, "you know the rules of this raffle. I'm going to ask Bill Calderson's little girl, Rachel, to come up and draw the lucky number. But first, I want any two of you to inspect this box and the numbers. Where's an honest face?"

"Here!" Greg Boucher shouted.

Amid catcalls, Benton laughed, "Come up, Greg! . . . And you there, Billy McGee! Roll up your sleeves before you lay a finger on this box."

They came forward and inspected the box, then the second open box containing the ticket stubs; after which Benton poured the stubs into the box, closed the top flaps and held the box high, showing the circular hole that had been cut in the top.

"All right, Bill!" Benton called. "Where's Rachel?"

Bill Calderson lifted his nine-year-old daughter to the counter and said warningly, "I've got ten chances, Rachel. You'd better draw luck for your pa."

"If she does," Benton said, "she'll draw again . . . Rachel, I'll shake the box, then you reach in and take one ticket."

Rachel nodded, quite overcome with excitement. Benton gave the box a thorough shaking, then knelt in full view, and said, "All right, Rachel. Just one ticket."

Rachel thrust a chubby arm through the hole, fished around and twisted her pink face with concentration, and finally drew a wrinkled stub. Benton placed the box on the bar, rolled up his sleeves and showed his open hands to the crowd, fingers separated. Then he accepted the ticket from Rachel, read the number silently, and passed it to Dick Burnett, who read and passed it to Calderson, who read and held it aloft.

" Rachel drew Number Six Hundred and Seven ! " Benton called. " Who's the lucky lady or gentleman ? Step up and claim your prize ! "

In the stillness that followed, heads turned every way, looking and waiting. Johnny Cork saw an arm go up from near the door, and heard the voice, " Why, by golly ! That's my number ! "

" Ed Webber ! " Benton shouted. " The chemist wins ! "

Dick Burnett called, " All right, folks ; the bar is open and ready ! Let's drink to Ed Webber and good luck . . . Johnny, get down ! "

Johnny Cork leaped behind the bar, followed by Benton, and felt the Marshal's strong fingers nudge his back. " Get out of here," Benton said softly, " before they start tearing the town apart."

Johnny Cork rose at eight o'clock and walked through the littered street to Webber's shop, round the back to the living quarters, and knocked smartly. Webber answered, in night-shirt and cap, and led Johnny to the kitchen. Johnny Cork stacked five hundred dollars in gold pieces between his hands.

Webber eyed them questioningly and said, " Well, Johnny ? "

" I'll tell you, Ed," Johnny Cork said. " I can do the job, but you don't need me here. Here's five hundred in gold, on this table. A fine return for a dollar investment. What do you say, Ed ? Will you take the money and release me from my promise ? "

Webber thumbed his jaw, regarding the gold, and coughed gently. " You had this worked out from the start, Johnny ? "

" Yes," Johnny Cork said. " It's legal, Ed. There was nothing in the rules to say I couldn't buy off, was there ? "

" Well," Webber said, " I've watched you for eight months, ever since you came here, and I know an up-and-coming man when I see one. I'll release you if you make me one promise."

" Name it ? " Johnny said.

" That you will never open another shop like mine while I'm in business here," Webber said, eyes laughing behind his sober face. " I can deal with almost anything, but not the man who thought out this raffle. I want no part of that ambition or competition."

" I promise," Johnny Cork grinned. " Shake, Ed. You're a real gentleman."

"Why, no," Webber said gently. "You're the gentleman, Johnny. You should have only the best."

"That's what I've finally worked out," Johnny Cork said. "It took a long time, Ed."

Johnny Cork walked slowly, wearing his new suit and white shirt self-consciously, moving up Pioneer past Ferguson's and east towards the church. He sat at the back during the service, unnoticed, and when it was over followed the young people through a side door to the street. Lea Ferguson came with her father and mother, saw him, and hurried ahead to take his hand. Johnny Cork saw the Summerhayses leave the church and turn towards their buggy under the cottonwood trees.

"Why, Johnny," Lea said brightly. "You're a famous man this morning. Papa told me last night he believes you will be one of the big men in this country in five years."

"Don't set a time limit," Johnny Cork said.

"I must go now," Lea said, and Johnny Cork realized she was still holding his hand boldly, and he was watching Grant Summerhays untie their team.

Lea said, "Won't you come to dinner tonight, Johnny? Mother is dying to meet you."

"I'm a clever man," Johnny Cork said. "I'll make a lot of money, won't I?"

"Of course you will," Lea said approvingly.

"And I'm a gentleman, too," Johnny Cork said softly. "Overnight, just like that. I don't think so, Lea. Thanks just the same, but I'll be busy tonight."

Johnny Cork walked swiftly through the trees and stood beside the Summerhayses' buggy, shook hands with Grant and Mrs. Summerhays, and looked at Mary.

"Got room for another plate tonight?" Johnny Cork asked.

"There's always room for you," Summerhays said simply. "You haven't been out for a long time."

"I know," Johnny Cork said. "I'll ride out this afternoon. I want to ask you about that bit of land to the west . . . Mary, why don't you ride in about three miles and meet me?"

Mary Summerhays smiled and looked at Johnny squarely, an honest and completely warm stare of new happiness and understanding. "I'll meet you at the creek," she said, "and tell you the truth before Dad can fill you full of lies about the land."

* * *

*A highbrow is a man who has found something more interesting than women.*

EDGAR WALLACE

# CARRIAGE FROM BRITAIN

## It was all a matter of the nesting instinct

## by ARTHUR GORDON

FOR those who like to know such things immediately, the place is a suburb of New York; the time, 8-42 a.m.

"How is it, my love," young Mrs. Mitchell said to her husband's dressing-gowned back, "that you can cook such good bacon? Far as I know, you can't cook anything else."

"Simplest thing in the world," Mr. Mitchell assured her, hovering over the frying pan. "Strips of bacon are just like women. If you keep 'em separated, and apply the heat gradually instead of rushing things, why—"

"Oh, John!" exclaimed his wife. "You talk the worst nonsense. Especially at breakfast on Sunday." She appealed to the third member of the family, "Doesn't he, Alexander?"

Alexander plunged one fist enthusiastically into his oatmeal. He held it up with a pleased expression.

"Oh, Lord!" cried his mother. "Must you? Again?"

"Da!" said Alexander firmly.

"In Russian," remarked his father, turning from the stove, "that means yes. Do you suppose he's got hold of some subversive literature?"

"Suppose you get hold of that dish-cloth," Mrs. Mitchell suggested, "and clean him up. Quick, before he gets it all in his hair!"

She watched her husband pounce on their offspring. After nine months of such indignities, Alexander endured it stoically.

While this was going on, Ambrose wandered in and flopped down on the kitchen floor with an awesome thud. The origins of Ambrose were obscure. His mother was probably a great Dane; his father might easily have been some lighthearted and transient police dog. In any case, the combination was impressive.

It never occurred to Ambrose that he belonged to the Mitchells; he believed, serenely, that they belonged to him. He watched Alexander being washed, grinning sympathetically with jaws that would have frightened a shark. He thumped his tail, and dishes rattled.

Marilyn Mitchell put her elbows on the table and rested her chin in her hands. She was wearing a green dressing-gown with a matching ribbon in her hair and she looked—her husband thought—superlatively cute. He told her so, but for once she did not seem to be listening.

"Sometimes," she said dreamily, "when he acts like this, I really wonder if we ought to let him ride in it."

"Let who ride in what?"

"Alexander. In his pram, of course. His new English baby carriage. When it arrives, I mean."

John flipped the bacon out of the pan and stepped carefully over Ambrose. "Well, what else would you do with it?"

"I'd push it!" Marilyn's eyes had a strange, exalted look. "Just push it up and down the block."

"What, with nobody in it?"

Marilyn regarded her son and her glance softened. "I guess I'd let Alexander ride in it. But honestly, John, you don't know what this pram means to me. Everybody else has something better than ours. The Drakes have a new car, and Mamie Driscoll has a fur coat, and Grace has a washing machine, and Sally has a—"

"I know, I know! Don't rub it in. Andy has a television set, and Jake has a new electric razor with eighteen heads—"

"But nobody will have a pram like this one!" Marilyn's glazed look returned. "I know just what it'll look like: pearl-grey body with a dark blue line round it, ivory handle, white tyres, adjustable hood, silk canopy with a fringe for hot weather—"

"Hydraulic brakes?" inquired her husband hopefully.

"No, no! A proper hand brake, that's what it'll have!" She snatched the astonished Alexander from his high chair and waltzed him round the room while Ambrose looked on indulgently. "You'll be the most bee-yootiful baby in the most bee-yootiful carriage in the most bee-yootiful suburb—"

"Glug!" said Alexander, looking pained.

Marilyn put him down hastily. "Where's the newspaper?" she said. "Maybe the *Britannic*'s in. Maybe the pram is on the pier, waiting for us. Right now this minute! Maybe—oh!" Her voice rose a full octave. "John! Look! It's coming in! Today!" She pointed with a trembling finger. "Quick! Don't just sit there! Do something!"

John Mitchell choked on his coffee. "If you think," he said when he could speak, "that I'm going to spend my Sunday driving to the city just to—"

Marilyn clasped her hands ecstatically. "Oh, maybe you could be back before dark! We could put Alexander in it after his nap and walk him up and down! Everyone would see us! We—"

"Look, dear," John said feebly, "it takes hours and hours to unload a big ship. Days, sometimes. Then there's the little matter of customs. You have to wait for them to—"

"You can do it," Marilyn asserted confidently. "You're always telling me you can do anything, when you want to! No . . . wait; we'll all go! I'll tell them it's a matter of life or death! I'll tell them Alexander is getting a—a neurosis from riding in that shabby old thing he's got now. I'll tell them—"

John Mitchell uttered a groan. "All right," he said, clutching his hair, "you tell them!"

1-27 p.m. "But, lady," said the gorilla-like man in charge of the stevedores at the pier, "we can't do nothin' like that! We gotta take off the cargo like it comes, see? But, lady—"

2-01 p.m. "I am sorry, Ma'am," said the white-haired chief of the customs inspectors, "we cannot possibly—"

2-54 p.m. "Careful, now!" Marilyn said to the harassed carpenter who was opening the crate in the presence of a small and exhausted group. "Don't you dare scratch it!"

Under Marilyn's firm direction, a vision of pearl-grey paint and gleaming chromium was emerging from the excelsior. Everyone stared, fascinated.

The chief of the customs inspectors, standing at John Mitchell's other elbow, leaned forward wearily. "Tell me, young man, does your wife usually behave like this?"

Mr. Mitchell looked thoughtful. "Only when the nesting instinct is being thwarted." He patted his son's bottom and found it—as he feared—somewhat damp. "Thank you for being so co-operative," he added.

"Good Lord," said the customs man, "what else was there to do?" He walked over and plastered a paper sticker on the side of the beautiful pram.

Marilyn turned on him like a tigress. "What do you think you're doing? Take that hideous thing off my pram!"

"Ma'am," said the customs man, "that label will enable you to wheel your pram past the inspector at the gate—a manœuvre I sincerely trust you will execute forthwith!"

"Well," said Marilyn ominously, "if it leaves a mark, I'm going to come back and have a word with you!"

"Can I put Alexander in it?" John sounded plaintive. "He's getting heavier by the minute."

"Certainly not!" snapped his wife. "He'll have to be changed first!"

She wheeled the carriage with great dignity through the gate. An apprehensive little man stamped the customs label gingerly. John breathed a sigh of relief. The struggle was over.

Marilyn glanced at the clock on the wall of the waiting room. "It's just three o'clock. If we hurry, we can be home by four-thirty. Daylight lasts till six. Wait till I see Mamie Driscoll's face!"

John Mitchell looked at the glittering vehicle that rolled on noiseless wheels ahead of them. "How much did you say this gadget cost?"

"Thirty-two pounds," Marilyn told him. "Plus the duty, of course. But they were devalued pounds. Anyway, I saved the money out of my housekeeping allowance. And besides, this is the sort of carriage Prince Charles used!"

"You don't say!" John was impressed in spite of himself. "Well, that should make it good for Alexander." He handed the baby to his wife. "I'll go on ahead and get the car. You wait for me at the entrance." He disappeared down the steps, two at a time.

Twenty yards away, the little man with the broken nose and the air of desperation watched the pram being loaded into the elevator that descended to the street. He hesitated for a moment, then dived into a phone booth and feverishly dialled a number.

"This is Manny!" he proclaimed furiously. "Lemme speak wit' the boss! Quick!" He waited, biting his nails. When he opened his mouth again, a torrent of words rolled forth in which apologies, explanations and lamentations were inextricably tangled.

The voice that replied to him was as cold and incisive as a knife. "You mean you're just standin' there while they drive off with that baby carriage? You mean you've let 'em snatch it right from under your nose?"

"Cripes, boss," cried Manny unhappily, "you never seen a dame like this one! Never! Nobody couldn't do nothin' with her. Who'd 'a' thought they'd turn up here today? Who'd 'a' thought they could get that crate outa the hold so soon? Who'd 'a' thought?"

"Get goin', Manfried," said the cold voice. "Follow 'em, wherever they go! I don't care if they drive to San Francisco; stay with 'em. Try to buy the carriage. Offer 'em anything for it. No, not anything; that'll make 'em suspicious. Offer 'em double what they paid for it. If we lose this shipment, I'll tell you where you'll be. At the bottom of the East River with a block of cement on your feet instead of shoes!"

Manny ran out of the booth and down the stairs. Near the entrance, an ancient convertible, top down, was just pulling away. On the back seat, ivory handle gleaming in the sunshine, stood the English pram.

Mr. Manfried waved his arms frantically. A taxi slid up to the kerb. He leaped in, pointing. " Follow that car ! " he gasped.

3-49 p.m. " You know," John Mitchell observed, peering into the rear-view mirror, " I think that taxi is following us."

" That's pretty silly of it," his wife said placidly. " It can't possibly know where we're going."

" No," John agreed, " but it seems to want to go there."

Silence again for ten minutes, then John said suddenly, " You know, I've just worked out how much thirty-two pounds really is." He looked outraged. " Almost ninety dollars ! "

" Well," Marilyn said contentedly, " what of it ? " She put one hand back and caressed the satiny side of the pram.

" ' What of it ? ' Do you realize how much money that is ? "

" You bet I do," his wife said loudly. " I've been saving two dollars a week out of the household money ever since we knew Alexander was on his way. But don't worry. It's an economy, really. Why, this pram will last us through four or five—"

" I know you and your economies," John said bitterly. " I know just how your mind works. It's appalling. You go out to buy something—let's say a hat. You see one for fifteen dollars, and you almost buy it. But not quite, because it's too expensive. So you buy one for five dollars. But then you persuade yourself you've just saved ten dollars. So you buy a new pocketbook for nine dollars and come home convinced you're way ahead of the game. Isn't that right ? "

" Now, John, don't exaggerate. You know I'd only have saved a dollar ! And don't tear your hair like that, because it's getting thin on top anyway. Besides, who are you to lecture me on economy ? That monster of yours—that Ambrose—eats a pound of horse-meat a day. That's a dollar and forty cents a week . . . and what have we to show for it at the end of each week ? Just a bigger, hungrier dog ! "

" Don't you pick on Ambrose," John said morosely. " You've already hurt his feelings today. He wanted to come with us."

" And sit back there chewing on my beautiful pram ? Don't be ridiculous ! Anyway, he's happy with the Driscolls. He lets the twins ride on him."

" He is not happy," John stated, " unless he is with us. He just hides his sorrow, that's all."

"Well," said Marilyn unfeelingly," he has lots of room to hide it."

When they drew up in front of the little house on Elm Street, the taxi was close behind them. So close, in fact, that when Marilyn stepped out, there on the sidewalk was Manny Manfried, bowing and smirking.

"Wunnerful baby carriage you got there, lady," cooed Mr. Manfried. "Wunnerful!"

Marilyn said nothing, but her expression thawed a bit. Clearly, despite his dubious appearance, this was a man of taste and discrimination. "It's from England," she said finally, not without pride.

Mr. Manfried rubbed his hands together. "You like to sell it, maybe?"

"Sell it?" Marilyn frowned and John, busy hoisting the pram out of the car, turned around and stared. "Certainly not! We've just got it!"

Mr. Manfried inched closer. He lowered his voice confidentially. "How much you pay for it? Hunnerd bucks? I give you hunnerd fifty. How about that?"

"Hey!" called the taxi driver. "How about my fare?"

Manny Manfried made an impatient gesture. John came up and looked at him narrowly. He said accusingly, "You've been following us all the way from New York!"

"Sure," said Manny nervously. "Sure! I seen you drivin' off with this wunnerful carriage. My wife—she's gonna have twins in October. She wants a carriage just like this one. I look all over New York, can't find—"

"How do you know it's going to be twins?" demanded Marilyn suspiciously.

Mr. Manfried gulped. "Doctor says so. Very fine doctor. Maybe triplets! I give you hunnerd seventy-five. I—"

"I think you're crazy," Marilyn said coldly. "Come on, John."

John eased the pram gently up the steps and into the house. The door closed.

"Hey, you!" barked the taxi driver. "I ain't got all day!"

His recent passenger took out a large roll of bills and paid him. The cab pulled away. Mr. Manfried stood there on the sidewalk a forlorn and solitary figure. He finished the nails on his right hand and started on his left.

Inside the Mitchells' house, Alexander found himself being dressed with unprecedented speed in his very best clothes. Marilyn was in charge of this operation. John was gloomily arranging mattress, blankets and coverlet in the new pram.

"Maybe he is crazy," he was saying. "But a hundred and seventy-five bucks! Gosh, that's almost a hundred per cent profit! And it's not as if we couldn't get another. Why—"

"I don't want another pram!" snapped Marilyn. "I want this one. What kind of a father are you, anyway—trying to profiteer on your own child?"

" All right, all right ! " John peered through the window at the dejected figure outside. " He's still there, though."

" Well, go out and tell him to go away ! "

" Yes, dear," said John meekly.

But when Marilyn came out a few minutes later, Mr. Manfried had not gone. Instead, she could hear her husband saying suspiciously, " How do I know you've got that much money ? "

" Here ! " said Mr. Manfried eagerly, producing the roll of bills. " How you like it ? Fives ? Tens ? Twenties ? "

Marilyn eased the pram down the steps. In it sat Alexander, looking cherubic. Late sunlight gilded the street. A Sunday-afternoon silence reigned. Everything was right, except for—

" Two hunnerd twenny-five ! " croaked Manny Manfried.

Marilyn put her chin in the air and began to push the pram along the quiet street. John followed. Manny Manfried scampered after them, moving sideways like a crab. From him issued a remarkable jumble of pleas, entreaties, propositions and prices.

Out of the corner of her eye, Marilyn saw the curtains twitch in Doris Alsterr's house. She knew that she was being observed, and ordinarily this would have filled her feminine soul with peace and satisfaction. But not now, not with this ridiculous retinue—

" You ! " She whirled on Manny Manfried suddenly. " Go away ! Before I call a policeman ! "

Manny fell back muttering. He went dismally to find a telephone.

" Cripes," he muttered, rehearsing his lines, " you never seen a dame as tough as this one. Never ! "

The tough dame walked along proudly, pushing her small son. One of her small gloved hands guided the pram, which was, indeed, feather-light. Her other hand rested possessively on the arm of her husband. She walked past the Drakes' house, where Ronny Drake was washing the new car. She sailed past the Barlows'. John Mitchell walked beside her, head bent, forehead furrowed. Once he muttered aloud, " Two hundred and twenty-five ! " Armoured with bliss, his wife ignored him.

At the end of the street, where the Driscolls lived, Ambrose came bounding to meet them. One of the twins, clamped to his tail, impeded him not at all.

Mamie Driscoll looking happily harassed as usual, followed him to the gate. Her eyes widened at the sight of the pram.

" Why, Marilyn," she cried, " how absolutely divine ! "

Marilyn beamed. " It is nice, isn't it ? "

John opened the gate and let Ambrose out, disengaging the twin in the process. " This character behave himself ? "

" Oh, he's wonderful," Mamie said. " No matter what the twins do to him, he just stands there grinning . . . But, Marilyn,

where did you get this divine pram? I simply must know!"

"Well," said Marilyn happily, "I first thought of it a year ago, when—"

"If you'll excuse me," John muttered, "I think I'll go on back and feed Ambrose." He kissed his wife, and moved away.

"Now," said Mamie, "begin at the beginning!"

Not far away, Manny Manfried came out of the telephone booth wiping the sweat from his forehead. At the same time, in an office on Tenth Avenue, Manny's boss—a handsome blond young man—hung up and looked at *his* boss, a very well-dressed gentleman with dark, velvety eyes, a diamond on his little finger, a cigar, and an accent that might have been Sicilian or possibly Greek.

"They won't sell it, Louie. They told Manny if he didn't lay off 'em they'd call the cops."

The diamond glittered as the cigar came out of the tight mouth. "Never did like-a thees baby carriage racket. Never!"

"Hell, Louie, it's worked fine up to now. Cheapest set-up we ever had. One guy in the factory over there, two more on the pier here. The bright boys down in Church Street are goin' crazy. They know the stuff's comin' in, but they don't know how. And they never will know."

"You think it funny have quart' a million bucks wind up some damn nursery?" Louie slammed his fist down suddenly on the desk. "Well, not-a me!"

"Aw, relax, Louie." The young man picked up a cylindrical length of ivory-coloured metal about two feet long. "When they quiet down for the night, we'll pay 'em a little visit."

"No rough-a stuff!" said Louie.

"Relax, Louie," said his lieutenant again. "We'll just take what we want and leave this in its place. Spider can do it."

He leaned back, smiling a little, twirling the ivory-coloured cylinder in his hands. The inside of it was hollow. The outside was a perfect replica of the pram handle made by the British firm for Alexander Mitchell, Esquire.

In the small house on Elm Street, John Mitchell leaned down surreptitiously from the kitchen table and tossed a fragment of hamburger to Ambrose, who caught it in mid-air. Mrs. Mitchell, busy at the sink, did not even bother to turn round. "I thought you said no one was to feed the dog at the table. Ever."

Mr. Mitchell looked abashed. Mrs. Mitchell laughed and rumpled his hair. "Go turn the radio on. We'll miss the news."

About eleven o'clock, Mr. Mitchell yawned and raised one eyebrow at Mrs. Mitchell, who nodded and closed her magazine. She let her gaze rest fondly on the beautiful pram that stood in its

appointed place under the stairs, and she said dreamily, " You know, I really don't blame that little man for wanting it."

John Mitchell frowned. " I've been thinking. There was something fishy about all that."

Marilyn looked at him, startled. " Oh, John, you don't think he could be a—a kidnapper or anything, do you ? I mean—"

Her husband laughed. " Kidnappers don't favour our income group, my love. Anyway, Ambrose eats kidnappers alive . . . Don't you, Ambrose,? "

The big dog opened one sleepy eye and twitched his tail.

Marilyn got up and opened the door that led to the kitchen. " Bed, Ambrose."

Ambrose trailed dejectedly into the kitchen, where his mat lay in its accustomed place in the corner. John Mitchell went upstairs, whistling to himself. Marilyn stood still for a moment, looking at Ambrose. Then she opened the icebox, took out some raw hamburger and gave it to him.

" There," said Mrs. Mitchell, " you spoiled old thing ! "

In the car parked fifty yards down the block, the hours passed tortoise-footed. At approximately three a.m., one of the shadowy figures moved. " Okay," it said hoarsely. " Get goin', Spider."

The door opened and a wiry figure got out carrying a cylindrical, ivory-coloured object. It began walking rapidly down the block, avoiding the patches of light cast by the street lamps. The two others watched it through the windscreen.

The hoarse voice spoke again, " You sure we got the right house, now ? "

Manny Manfried had long since run out of fingernails and was chewing the end of his tie. " That's it, aw right," he muttered.

In front of the Mitchells' house the figure hesitated. Then it drifted noiselessly up to the front door, found it locked, then slid along to one of the living-room windows.

Small but significant actions followed rapidly : a piece of tape pressed against the glass, a circular sweep with a glass cutter, a quick jerk, an experienced hand reaching in and releasing the catch, a slow raising of the sash, a stealthy entrance. A tiny pencil of light sweeping once round the room and coming to rest on the English pram. A momentary pause, then a faint chuckle of satisfaction, a tiny chink of metal as pliers gripped one of the bolts holding the handle to the frame—

At which point Ambrose emerged from the kitchen. The pencil of light whipped round. It fell directly upon the grinning jaws. There was a pregnant pause. Then, smiling happily, Ambrose advanced a few paces and lay down. This was his house—

he was delighted to have a guest in it. To show his pleasure, he thumped his tail two or three times.

"Hey, you," whispered the visitor. "Cut out that noise."

Pleased with this recognition, Ambrose thumped again.

Upstairs in the big double bed, Marilyn Mitchell's eyes flew open. She listened.

Her hand clutched her husband's shoulder. "John! Wake up! There's a burglar downstairs!"

"Nonsense. It's only Ambrose."

"It's that man," hissed Marilyn. "That horrid little man has come back for the pram."

"Now, dear," said John soothingly, "go back to sleep."

"My pram," muttered Marilyn. "My pram."

She thrust back the covers and stood up. She shrugged on her dressing-gown, went out into the hall. Her bare feet made no sound on the stairs. On the landing, she pressed a switch.

Light blazed through the living-room. Marilyn stared into the eyes of the talented character known to his intimates—and to the police of several states—as the Spider.

The Spider recovered first. He wrenched violently at the handle. One end of it came loose. He wrenched again.

At the sight of this desecration, something happened inside Marilyn. With a screech like a catamount's, she launched herself from the landing and descended squarely on her target's back. One arm hooked itself resolutely around his neck. With the nails of her other hand, she clawed at his eyes.

In the bedlam that followed, lights went on not only in the Mitchells' bedroom but all up and down the block. Downstairs, four at a time, came Mr. Mitchell. His arrival saved the intruder's eyesight—but not his face—from permanent damage.

"What's going on here?" roared the baffled Mr. Mitchell.

"My pram!" yelled Marilyn. "He was ruining my pram!"

In the parked car, Manny took the frayed end of the tie out of his mouth and looked at his companion with a wild surmise.

The car took off so fast that a police car with nothing better to do ran it down and booked the occupants on charges of speeding, reckless driving, and, ultimately, resisting arrest.

The police car being thus engaged, it fell to Sergeant McEvoy himself, of local headquarters, to answer the urgent summons to the house in Elm Street. There, he found a number of firm-looking citizens armed with golf clubs and other implements, keeping watch over a somewhat lacerated burglar.

Marilyn Mitchell, reluctantly pacified, sat in a chair holding her bright-eyed son on her lap. John Mitchell, having completed

the removal of the handle from the pram, was scratching his head over certain small packages thus brought to light.

In his youth, Sergeant McEvoy had served some time with the Narcotics Bureau in Manhattan.

"Heroin," he said flatly. "About fifteen ounces of pure heroin. Let's see." He wrinkled his red forehead. "That would dilute down to about ninety thousand capsule doses. At two and a half per dose—let's see again—that's about a quarter of a million bucks' worth. My old pals down on Church Street will be delighted. And just how did all this come about, may I ask?"

John Mitchell, still holding the two ivory-coloured handles, looked up and smiled. "Well, officer, I guess you could say it all began with the nesting instinct."

Which in a manner of speaking, of course, it did.

* * *

## *ANSWERS to LOCAL COLOUR on page 63*

1. *The "Boar's Head Tavern," frequented by Falstaff, in "Henry the Fourth," Part One, by William Shakespeare.*
2. *"The Fisherman's Rest," visited by Sir Percy Blakeney, hero of "The Scarlet Pimpernel," by Baroness Orczy.*
3. *The Inn in the poem, "Tarantella," by Hilaire Belloc.*
4. *"The Maypole Inn" in "Barnaby Rudge," by Charles Dickens. The inn was partly destroyed during the Gordon Riots.*
5. *The "Mermaid Tavern" in "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern," by John Keats, where famous poets foregathered.*
6. *The inn in the folksong, "There is a tavern in the town." The young man forsook his true-love for wine and a "damsel dark."*
7. *The "Star and Garter" in the play, "The Doctor's Dilemma," by George Bernard Shaw. Here a group of doctors discussed whether to attempt to cure the feckless artist, Louis Dubedat.*
8. *The "Admiral Benbow," starting-point of Jim Hawkins' adventures, in "Treasure Island," by Robert Louis Stevenson.*

## *SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144*

*Across.* 7, Guinea-pig. 8, Karoo. 10, Carousal. 11, Egoist. 12, Parr. 13, Galloway. 15, Migrate. 17, As a rule. 20, Meringue. 22, Rapt. 25, Bandit. 26, Bandsman. 27, Gloom. 28, Firewater.

*Down.* 1, Jubal. 2, Ancona. 3, Sanscrit. 4, Tillage. 5, Bad odour. 6, Constable. 9, Bell. 14, Wine-vault. 16, Raindrop. 18, Stranded. 19, Leg-bail. 21, Gate. 23, Postal. 24, Layer.

# SADDLE SONG

**Iron sinew'd, satin skinned or Dobbin in the barn**

*Their heads lift suddenly ; some scent or sound*
*Disturbs them, warns them of danger.*
*They stand tense, motionless as though bound*
*By some unseen fear ; then anger*
*Like an electric shock, sends them wheeling*
*Across the meadow, flashing their tails and manes,*
*Passionate life pulsing through them, the feeling*
*Of freedom runs like fire through their veins.*

*The meadow trembles beneath them, the sun*
*Glints on their flashing hooves ; the river*
*Opens out before them as they run*
*Beautiful and untamed, as their bodies quiver*
*With the old delight, the primitive*
*Answering to their senses ; their master, Man,*
*Forgotten in this new desire to live*
*Exultantly as when their world began.*

DOUGLAS GIBSON

## *Horse Sense*

A traveller arriving at an inn very wet and cold—(not the inn, but himself)—found the fire so surrounded he could not get near it, nor could sundry hints induce a movement to give him any benefit from its warmth. He rang the bell. "Have you any oysters?" "Plenty, sir." "Open a dozen and a half, and bring them to me, with some pepper and lemon: you need not lay a cloth."

The oysters came; and after squeezing a drop of lemon juice on each, and a proper sprinkling of pepper—"Take them on the dish as they are, and give them to my horse." "To your horse, sir?" cried the astonished waiter. "Yes, just show him the dish; he will pick them up." "Very well, sir," said the man, chuckling at the idea of seeing the horse take his unusual treat. "Well," said the other travellers, "we must go and see your extraordinary horse; does he often eat oysters?" "No," most veraciously said the traveller; "I only order them for him on particular occasions."

Off they went, and the traveller ensconced himself most comfortably in a chair before the fire. Presently, in came the waiter with the dish of oysters, followed by the disappointed party. "Your horse won't touch the oysters, sir: as soon as I showed him the dish, he snorted, so I was glad to get out of his stall." "Never mind," said the traveller, "they will do for my supper; and as I am getting warm, you may now lay the cloth."

The other travellers saw the hoax that had been played on them, so walked off.

HARRY HIEOVER, 1795-1859

## *Proud Pedigree*

*Their glossy flanks and manes outshone*
*The flying splinters of the sun.*

*The tranquil rhythm of that team*
*Was as slow-flowing meadow stream.*

*And I saw Phidias' chisel there—*
*An ocean stallion, mountain mare,*

*Seeing, with eyes the Spirit sealed*
*Plough-horses in a quiet field.*

PATRICK KAVANAGH

## *Art—*

The red curtain hisses open, and the Lippizan steeds, "the most beautiful horses in the world," hurry out and circle around their trainer. If they did no more than keep moving they would score a triumph, these eight white stallions with their golden head-gear, and their crowns of dark-violet ostrich plumes. Magnificent creatures, delicate and musical, provocative and coquettish, impetuous, born to dance, and unapproachable in their pride . . .

The Lippizans race through the sand at full tilt, bending their bodies inward to the centre of the ring, snorting with satisfaction because they are able to give free rein to their high spirits. The human voice calls, the storm ebbs to rest, and the stallions confront the man in one row. The whip drops down, shoots up again like a bird, and carries up all eight stallions into the air in a "curvet royal," setting them upright on their hind legs like marble statues. It marks the end of the Lippizans' act.

PAUL EIPPER, *Circus*

## —*And Life*

*When Dobbin and Robin, unharnessed from the plough,*
*Stamp smoking to their stalls,*
*They pass beneath white horses with long manes*
*Shining upon the walls,*
*White horses airily leaping through great hoops*
*Along applauding tracks*
*Or carrying princesses in rosy tights*
*Upon their backs.*

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *The Circus-Postered Barn*

## *Strange Steeds*

Ethiopea (as it is reported) breedeth horses having wings and horns.

The horses of America are very necessary and convenient for war. Brittain breedeth little horses and amblers.

The Sybean mares are taken with a pipe, and by these allurements they are made tame and leave off all wild qualities, and whither so ever the pipe shall allure them, thither they follow, and the shephearde when he stands, they leave marching forward, and if he sing more pleasently, they are so delighted with it that they cannot hold teares.

EDWARD TOPSELL, *17th Century*

## *Mirage*

*I saw a man on a horse*
*Riding against the sun.*
*" Hallo ! Don Cossack ! " I cried.*
*He shouted, " Hallo, my son ! "*

*The Caspian sea shimmered ;*
*The Kazak tents shone*
*For a moment in England,*
*Then the horseman was gone.*

RICHARD CHURCH

## *Exeunt Omnes*

Lord Ronald said nothing ; he flung himself from the room, flung himself upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions.

STEPHEN LEACOCK, *Gertrude the Governess*

# MR. WINKLES ON THE RHINE

## "Ghost?" he said. "They 'it too hard for ghosts"

## by MALCOLM FIELDING

NOW that the misfortunes which befell my friend Winkles are some forty years old, I feel that the time has come to put pen to paper and record them. Caley, who was present when I first made the acquaintance of the little cockney hero of the story, and who witnessed the final act of the drama, is far better qualified than I am to tell the story, but he declines to do so, stating that as a busy Q.C. his reputation for untruthfulness is already sufficiently established, so I must undertake the task myself. I may say at once that Mr. Winkles' name was not Winkles and that Caley is not the name which appears on my friend's briefs.

In the year 1912 Caley and I set out on a walking tour on the Continent. We had remained in London during August, gathering up such crumbs of work as fell from the tables of our busier and more learned brethren, and we were fairly tired when we set out. We lazed about a good deal, and one evening early in September we found ourselves at Lorch on the Rhine, where we hoped to be able to spend a few days at a little Jäger's cottage in the woods. The next morning early we climbed to the ruined castle of Nollich to see the sun rise over the hills.

We were sauntering down again, our minds intent on hot coffee and rolls, when our ears were assailed by a noise which transported us back, body and soul, to Margate sands. Not far off, in fact just off the path, an Englishman with a cockney accent was singing to the accompaniment of the bones. Now the bones, attractive in themselves, are no part of the equipment of the average travelling Englishman. The hour and place were wholly unsuited to such a performance, and we gazed at each other in blank astonishment.

Our first impulse was to seek some other path and leave our countryman to his own devices. Then suddenly the singing stopped, the voice, which, as we remembered later, was singularly mirthless, tailed off into a wail, although the noise of the bones—played, if anything, even more vigorously—continued as before.

Convinced that something odd was astir, we rounded the bend with quickening steps, and there seated on a rock by the road-side

was a hatless, dishevelled figure, waving his arms above his head in the manner approved from time immemorial by all bone-experts, wrapt, it seemed, in a very ecstasy of bone-playing. He took not the slightest notice of us as we stood watching him. In the clear morning light we could not but notice that the little man's face was grimed with dirt, his hands were scratched and blood-stained and his clothes were torn. Our friend, in fact, looked as if he had had a very rough time. Then, as it was borne in upon us that the man was ill, he swayed, dropped his bones and toppled forward in a heap at our feet.

It only remained to carry him down to the cottage, put him to bed and send for the local doctor. His name, it appeared, was Winkles—Thomas Winkles, for he had a letter in his pocket; and he was obviously in a very bad way.

The good doctor said little but shook his head. There was, it seemed, great physical exhaustion, coupled with some mental disturbance which he could not account for.

"I will come tomorrow," he said. "For the moment I can do nothing; and, by the way, I suppose you know that your friend has been most cruelly treated. I don't pretend to understand the matter,"—and here he fixed me with a cold, fishy eye—"but he has evidently been scourged on the back and shoulders with some barbarous kind of whip. He will recover with care. Give him a bath when he regains consciousness. It seems to me to be a matter for enquiry, but he is your countryman, not mine. I wish you good day."

It was clear that the good doctor thought we knew more about the matter than we had seen fit to tell him.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish. Caley and I, two peaceful holiday-makers, landed with a sick and penniless bone-player, of whom we knew nothing except that his name was Winkles, and that he was travelling abroad with a ticket from a London travel-agency. Clearly Mr. Winkles was going to be our responsibility for some time to come.

The patient, however, was curiously tenacious of life, and within a few days he began to mend. He was soon able to talk, and his first demand was for his bones, which Caley had luckily picked up. He seized them, gave an impromptu performance of great brilliance, and then fell asleep. Later, on the balcony of the little house, sitting in the shade of the great forest trees, golden with September hues, with the great river flowing majestically below us, he told us his story. At first I set him down as a tiresome and clumsy liar. Later I thought he was mad. Now I don't know what to think.

It was not easy to get facts out of Mr. Winkles. He had a

grievance and at the same time an extraordinarily flabby mind, but the story, shorn of much that was irrelevant, was as follows.

Mr. Winkles assisted his mother in the management of a small general shop in the East End of London. The shop flourished, but Mrs. Winkles had her hand on the till, and her son, who longed to see the world, was kept sadly short of what he called "the needful." His main interest in life was bone-playing, which amounted to a passion, and he told us with pride how he had been "corner man" at the local nigger-minstrels and had brought down the house.

Early in the year an unexpected windfall in the shape of a small legacy set him free from the maternal apron-strings, and armed with a circular tourist ticket he started off to see the Rhine in the company of some twenty other like-minded pleasure-seekers. All had gone well as far as Lorch. Here one of the party, who sympathized with Mr. Winkles' fruitless efforts to procure a small Burton, persuaded him to sample Rhine wine, with the wicked intent, so Winkles maintained, of making him drunk. He drank deep of Rüdesheimer.

The day was hot, the beverage was unfamiliar, but he remembered with pride that although light-headed he was not drunk, and that he delighted his fellow travellers, as well as the landlady's pretty daughter who waited on them, with his songs and bones. Then they all climbed the hills behind the town, and Mr. Winkles, seized with a desire for slumber, ensconced himself in a window of the ruined castle of Nollich and fell asleep.

"I 'ad my bit of sleep," he said, "and when I woke up I 'ad the fright of my life. Straight in front of me was a long table, wiv' all kinds of coves sittin' there and drinkin' and laughin' and shoutin', fit to deafen yer, it was. They was dressed most outlandish, such coats and 'ats I never saw out of a book, and they all 'ad great long swords and daggers, and I didn't like it at all. I thought at first as 'ow I must 'ave been fetched somewheres while I was 'aving me forty winks, but no, there I was in the same winder, like when I dozed off, only the winder 'ad got itself all done up, and wasn't a ruin no more. There was a roof on top of the 'all, which I swear wasn't there before, and the ground was all levelled up—lovely it was.

"Says I to myself, 'Winkles, my lad, go to sleep again and wake up sober.' So I shut my eyes and tried to forget it all, but them Johnnies was making such a din, shoutin' and talkin' the most 'orrible gibberish, and d'yer think I could get to sleep?—not a bit of it. They knew all abaht me too, for they kep' looking at me and waggin' their silly 'eads, and then, when they saw I was awake, one of the coves, wot seemed to be a bit of a boss, begun to stare

at me—nasty cold kind of look, it was, like when I was in front of the Beak once at 'ome. Then 'e sent one of 'is pals for me, a nasty big feller, 'e came and lifted me up under 'is arm, like a kid 'e did.

"'Nah then,' I says nasty like, 'oo o'er yer pushin', mister? Give over,' I says, and fetched him one on the shin wiv' my boot. That riled 'im proper, and 'e give me a clip on the ear which fair knocked me silly, and afore I knew it I was standin' right in front o' that bloke I spoke of, wiv' his 'orrid eyes which looked right thro' me. Then I got the wind up proper, and began to run for the door for all I was worth, but one o' them tripped me up and brought me back and started jabbin' at me wiv' his knife.

"'Ere stow it,' I 'ollered. 'I'm an Englishman, I'd 'ave yer know and don't you forget it. Stow yer jabbin' and 'ollering or I'll fetch the perlice. And 'oo are yer anyway?' But it was like talkin' to noodles: they couldn't twig a word I said, and when they started yappin' at me it was like double Dutch—not a Christian word anywheres. And then they started foolin' abaht wiv' me: trotted out an 'orrible dwarf, a fair deformity 'e was, and tried to make me fight 'im, but I wasn't doin' no fightin', so they made us wrestle.

"That there dwarf got 'old of me and turned me upside down, round and round, and 'eld me wrong way up and shook me—most undignified it was. All me money came rollin' about, my bones fell 'aht, and then 'e dropped me on me 'ead. You should 'ave 'eard them larf. Then they picked me up, and there I set, looking at them blokes, blinkin' at 'em with my poor old 'ead going bump, bump. Oo—I did feel bad.

"'Ere,' I says, 'this is a bit thick. If you've quite done I think I'll go 'ome.' But they grinned at me silly like. 'Yes,' I says, 'thanks, I'll go 'ome nah.'"

But there was no home for poor Mr. Winkles for a long time. How and why he had blundered into this mediæval stronghold is a mystery, but once there he had a most uncomfortable time. His tormentors evidently regarded him, these ghosts of bygone times, as sport provided by the Gods. They made him drunk, they kicked him, they tossed him in carpets, they pricked him with swords and daggers, and finally in a paroxysm of humour they turned him into a whipping boy, and the performance went on half through the night. If anything went amiss he was whipped, if a dog barked he was whipped, if the fire died down he was whipped, and when there was no more wine he was whipped again. Then they made him sing and play his bones.

There he sat, this odd little twentieth-century cockney grocer, flapping his bones and singing music-hall songs at the top of his voice to a cowd of mediæval robber-knights, who ought to have been dead and decently buried centuries ago.

Then, in an instant, the company lost shape and vanished away. The walls and roof dissolved and fell to ruins, and Winkles found himself at cock-crow alone and very sore, singing his absurd little songs to the ruins of Nollich castle.

Amidst all his experiences there was one man he would never forget, a nasty bearded, black fellow who did the whipping. He was going to have the law on him. As soon as he got home he was going to see a solicitor. We took him back to the ruins and tried to convince him that he had been the victim of nightmare, but he would have nothing more to do with it. Ghosts? They hit too hard for ghosts. And—astounding as it may seem—there was his English money among the stones, and here and there were signs of blood. We were reduced to silence. Then I suggested, more in jest than in earnest, that he should come back next year with an axe and settle his account with the black-bearded gentleman. But, as I was to learn later, it is ill jesting with a man of that type.

That was the end of Mr. Winkles for the time being. He was soon well enough to travel, and, giving him three days' start to allow for mishaps and five pounds for his expenses, we returned to London. Both Caley and I had much to do that winter and we hardly thought of Mr. Winkles, but one day in the spring, after a fight in an East London County Court, he came back to my mind and I was tempted to look him up.

I found the little shop without much difficulty and introduced myself to old Mrs. Winkles, explaining that I had met her son in Germany. She was a forbidding person, and remarked with a snort that Thomas had met some queer people in Germany, knocking him about and so on, and she hoped the little fool would now learn sense and spend his holidays in England. I took my leave as speedily as possible, and as I turned the corner there was Winkles himself. He gazed at me in consternation and his jaw dropped. Putting his embarrassment down to the recollection that he had never repaid the money we had provided for his journey back to England, I suggested a visit to the local pub, and there the whole story came out.

Winkles had been boasting. He had become proud of his adventure, and as the scars disappeared and the events receded into the distance, the silly fellow had let his imagination run away with him. There had been more than a suggestion of great personal bravery. Particulars of an assault on the dwarf had been supplied, and, like Falstaff's men in Lincoln green, the number of his assailants had considerably increased. Moreover he had fought them single-handed and routed them, and somewhere a maiden in distress had crept into the story.

What was worse, he had attracted the notice of a local spiritualist

named Simpson, who was also an undertaker's assistant, and who was now beside himself with excitement. A fund had been started to send them both to Lorch in September in time for a return performance, and Winkles, much to his disgust, had been forced by circumstances to begin a study of the German language. His chief anxiety at the moment was whether I had said anything to the old lady. I reassured him on the point, promised myself another visit to Lorch on the eventful day, and returned to my Chambers.

I could not help noticing that nothing would induce Winkles to enter the doors of the King's Head (where I suppose he had been at first a hero and then a figure of fun). We had our talk in the tap-room of another hostelry. There is no doubt that Winkles, the victim of his own lies, was once again a very frightened little man.

As luck would have it I could not get to Lorch in September, but Caley was staying with friends at Bad Nauheim and promised to be there. What follows is based on a letter he wrote me from Lorch. He had arrived in good time, but being a humorist in his way he took with him a friend called King, whom he introduced as a newspaper correspondent who was going to write up the whole story. Winkles did not take to King, but was pathetically glad to see Caley, pressed five pounds (the amount we had advanced for his fare back to England a year ago) into his hand, and begged him to persuade the spiritualist to call the whole thing off. He even suggested that Caley should get into touch with the police and have him locked up for the night.

But one look at the man was sufficient. He had come to Germany to see ghosts and, by Jove, he was going to see them. Both heroes were in a great state of nerves, and at last Caley, who, although a Q.C., is not wholly devoid of human feelings, agreed to go with them, and King was to go as well, much as he disliked the prospect of spending a night in a ghost-haunted ruin.

The rest must be told in Caley's own words.

"After supper, Winkles in a panic, and the spiritualist all excitement, climbed the hill with us, and we all settled ourselves as comfortably as we could in the ruins. It was a dismal night. The wind howled, there were too many bats for my liking and an owl hooted in the distance. I could hear Winkles' teeth chattering. No one spoke.

"Then the moon got up, and King and I strolled across to look at the river. We had no idea of letting the chief actors out of our sight, but the river looked so lovely that we found a sheltered spot and sat smoking and talking for longer than we knew, and when we returned to the ruins there was no sign of Winkles or the spiritualist. Cursing them for a couple of cowards, we returned

to Lorch, expecting to find them there, but they were not to be seen. It was then two o'clock and we went to bed.

"Next morning there was still no news of the adventurers, and feeling distinctly nervous about them, we climbed once more to the ruins. Not a soul was to be seen. We went through those ruins with a tooth-comb, and had just decided to go down and rouse the local police when King heard what seemed to be a call for help. He pushed aside a large stone and there, hunched up and half dead, in a disused well, was the spiritualist. Of Winkles there was not a sign.

"We fished the wretched man out. He was shivering with cold and crying. As he found his feet he stumbled and fell on his face. He had lost his coat, his shirt was in rags, and through the rents we could see his naked back. It was a horrid sight—bruised and raw. We looked and gasped, but before we could speak the man had picked himself up and was running for dear life through the trees. That was the last we saw of the spiritualist. A paragraph in the local paper next day reported that a mad Englishman had been captured in the neighbourhood of Mainz, and that the British Chaplain had taken him in charge."

Caley's letter ended with a suggestion that I might look Winkles up.

The next day I set off for the little shop. Mrs. Winkles was there, but there was no news of her son. He was "dawdlin' about in furrin parts, the fool, instead of mindin' his work."

A few days afterwards I was working late when there was a knock on the door. My clerk had gone so I opened it myself, and there was Mr. Winkles himself, neatly dressed and apparently quite well. I asked him in, gave him a cigarette and a drink, and waited for him to give an account of himself. He fiddled with his cigarette, sipped his drink, spluttered and finally began to giggle helplessly.

Little by little the story then came out.

After Caley and King had left them, Simpson, it appeared, went nosing about the ruins, asking childish questions—"talking like a silly ass," as Winkles put it. "Then," he went on, "he came on a big stone on the ground, ''Ere,' he says, ''ere's a well, come and look.' 'What,' says I, 'a well?' 'Yes,' says 'e, 'but I can't see no water.' 'Well, get in an' look,' I says, for I was about fed up, and I gives him a shove and down he goes. Then I 'ooked it quick—only just in time, for the 'orrible place was turning round and round. There was lights and singin' and what not. The blighters must 'ave found old Simpson.

"Well I'm glad it was 'im as copped it, not me. I got down to

that river and 'ung about till a boat comes along. I 'ops on double quick. There was an English gent on it. He puts me on a train somewheres and I gets back 'ome. Crikey, what a life!"

I couldn't help smiling. What an end to a great adventure—two heroes, one with a sore back, the other in a paroxysm of terror, running for their lives in different directions across Germany!

Then a thought struck me.

"But," I said, "you—er—*pushed* Simpson down that well. Isn't he going to take offence? Perhaps even take proceedings?"

"What, 'im?" said Winkles. "Oh no, 'e'll never take proceedings. *He'll* never say a word. You know, it *would* sound a bit silly like if 'e did, wouldn't it, sir? And 'im a spiritualist an' all. An' it wouldn't be any too good for business, 'im in the undertaking line as well. Not that 'e's a spiritualist any more. Oh no. It's one thing tapping tables and 'earing voices, but it's another thing altogether when you start getting pushed around by a nasty bit of work like that there dwarf."

I laughed, and poured another drink for Winkles.

He sipped it slowly, then put it down. "But I tell you straight, guvnor. Ruins?" he said. "Blast all ruins. They'd be the ruination of any decent soul. No more spiritualism for Simpson. But no more ruins for me, not ever."

* * *

## *MARRIAGE LINES*

"Do you think I am too young to marry, Aunt?"

"If I had my time over again, dear," replied the old maid, "I'd get married before I had the sense enough not to."

J.B.

*Before you change over from spinstering and batching*
*Be sure that a few of your allergies are matching.*

VIRGINIA BRASIER

A long life with all its accidents is barely enough for a man and a woman to understand each other; and in this case to understand is to love. The man who understands one woman is qualified to understand pretty well everything.

JOHN BUTLER YEATS

A wise woman will always let her husband have her way.

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN

This was the cream of marriage, the nightly turning out and sharing of the day's pocketful of memories.

JAN STRUTHER

# DARK HUNTRESS

**For a woman like her there was only one kind of amusement—but he didn't see it**

## by STUART CLOETE

"AVRIL MASON used to be the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," Prendegast said.

I was staying with the Masons. Someone had given me a letter of introduction to them, and they had asked me to visit them, so I was interested in what Prendegast said. He lived on the next farm and I'd dropped in to see him, the way one does in Africa. I needed exercise and had gone for a ride; and then, seeing his homestead, I'd thought I'd drop in. I was curious about him because Avril had said, "He's a queer character. We don't see much of him, and when we do see him he doesn't say a word."

Well, he seemed disposed to talk now. Perhaps because I was a stranger, perhaps because I was a writer and people seem to talk to writers. Writers are out of their world, unreal to them, like griffins and unicorns.

When I'd introduced myself, Prendegast had said, "The writer?" and I had said, "Yes."

"I read a lot," he said, "and I've enjoyed your books."

I was flattered and pleased, and took to him at once—this being human nature. But I was particularly interested in what he said about Avril. It confirmed what I had thought myself when I met her. She'd been beautiful. Twenty years ago or so, she must have been lovely. She still had the bone in her face, the structure was there; she still had great dark brown eyes; she still had a good figure and good legs. Her hair was grey now, of course, but she had masses of it, and it was strong and vital, with a natural wave. She blued it heavily and used a lot of make-up, but the beauty was all there underneath. She was like a picture postcard that someone has written over. Time had written over her picture, blurring it a bit, smudging it, fading it; but the picture was there, and Prendegast's remark brought it out again.

Avril Mason was beautiful (he went on). She had the kind of beauty that brings a man's heart into his mouth, and she was, as far as I was concerned, the very last kind of neighbour I could have

wanted. In fact, if I had been asked what sort of people I should like least, I should have said a beautiful young woman with an invalid husband. At least I should have said that if I had been clever enough to think of it.

I'll never forget meeting her. I was sitting on the stoep working out some stock returns when she walked in. I was in a filthy mess, sweaty and covered in dust, having just come from the cattle kraals. Nothing more unlikely than a woman like Avril Mason walking up the steps of a South African farm stoep could be imagined. I looked up from my figures and there she was. Tall, dark, slim, beautifully turned out in a white suit with white gloves and a white felt hat.

"You're Mr. Prendegast?" she said.

I said, "Yes," and then, "Where's your car? I didn't hear it."

"I left her at the back," she said.

I said nothing. I just stared, I think. She really left me speechless. It was a minute before I asked her to come in and sit down, and called the boy to make tea.

By this time I'd taken her in—the details of her dress, her lovely hands and slim legs and ankles. Her hair was long and she wore it in a knot at the back of her neck as she does now, only of course it was brown then—a lovely, rich, dark brown. Sepia colour with almost a touch of red in it. Her eyes were brown, velvety soft. They were the colour of dark sherry, very large and set wide apart, and they gave her a young, innocent look. Her eyes have changed a lot. I guessed her to be about twenty-five, and as it turned out I was one year out. She was twenty-six. It was years since I'd seen anyone like her.

She said, "We've been looking at farms and have more or less decided to buy Avalon."

It was quite undeveloped then. Just bare veld.

"I hope you do," I said.

"We'll buy it," she said. "I've just decided."

And I felt that her meeting me had clinched the deal in some way. As a matter of fact, that's an understatement. I knew it, but did not want to know it. I knew from the way she had looked at me, and from the quick way she was breathing.

Then the *we* dawned on me. "'We,'" I said. "You said 'we.' Is there someone with you?"

"Yes," she said, "my husband. He's an invalid—at least he's not at all well. And Phyllis. They're in the car."

"I'll go and get them," I said, getting up.

She went on, "My husband is Frederick Mason—Freddy Mason."

"The polo player," I said.

"Yes," she said. "He was badly wounded and has to live

quietly in the country. That's the reason why we're buying a farm." Then she said, " This is good horse country, isn't it ? "

I said, " Yes. We're high here. No horsesickness to speak of, and except for Mooi River and parts of the Karoo and Free State it's the best place I know."

" Then that settles it."

I said, " I'll fetch them," and went out.

The car was a big green Cadillac. In the front seat there was a native driver, and at the back were her husband and Phyllis.

" Come in," I said, " and have some tea."

Mason said, " Thanks," and got out of the car carefully. He was a man of about forty and looked very ill. Phyllis followed him. " This is Miss French—Phyllis French," Mason said.

We shook hands. " My name's Prendegast," I said.

Miss French was a small woman of about thirty—a rather fragile-looking washed-out blonde. She had tired blue eyes and she seemed very quiet. I remember thinking then that she looked rather like a governess.

They followed me in and we all sat down.

" My wife has told you, I suppose, we're thinking of buying the place next door," Mason said.

I said, " Avalon."

" Yes," he said, " but it really depends on my wife." He smiled at her. " She's got to make the decision."

" We'll buy it," she said.

" You've made up your mind, then," he said.

She looked at me under her lashes. " Mr. Prendegast has decided me."

I found later that this was typical of her. The double bluff in which the absolute truth was used to disguise the truth.

" What did he tell you ? " her husband asked.

" He says it's good horse country; and then, having a civilized neighbour . . . "

I said, " Not so civilized."

She said, " Civilized enough."

Mason said, " I've got to lead a quiet, open-air life. She told you, I suppose."

I said, " Yes," and then asked Miss French how she would like it.

" I don't really know," she said, " but I like a quiet life. Books," she said, " and music . . . "

" Phyllis is a highbrow," Mrs. Mason said, and laughed.

" And you ? " I asked.

" Me ? " She laughed again. " I can be happy anywhere."

Not much more was said, as far as I remember. The conversa-

tion became general and centred more or less on farming, cattle and horse breeding, shooting, the question of labour, and similar topics. They only stayed an hour and then left for Nylstroom, where they were spending the night at the hotel. They were going back to Johannesburg the next day to close the deal.

When they said good-bye Mrs. Mason added, " We're staying at the Carlton, if you want to get hold of us, or are coming into town."

I said I only went to Jo'burg once a year to see the dentist. " I hate the place," I said. And that was the last I saw of them for some time.

They were, however, in my mind quite a lot. Her looks, the sick husband, the sad-looking secretary or whatever she was. Why would people like that want to come into the wilds ? What would they do with themselves ? Avalon is a big place. Five thousand *morgen*—a *morgen* here, as you no doubt know, is a little over two acres. It was, as I said, quite undeveloped then but had good grazing and plenty of water. But it was hard to visualize them there. They belonged in England, America, or the South of France. It all puzzled me ; and then I accepted it. People should know their own business best.

What did puzzle me, though, was her interest in me. I'm not a ladies' man. Never was. But the look she'd given me meant something, or I thought it did ; and then I put that out of my head, too. I was very busy losing a lot of stock with a pride of lions that had come in from the reserve, and one of my best bulls was sick. A bull meant a lot to me then. A bull's half the herd, especially when you're grading up on native cows. Funny, now that I can afford it I seldom lose anything. But then it was different—lions, wild dogs, leopards, jackals, every damn thing. Of course the place was wilder then. (He spoke almost regretfully. He was silent for a few minutes and then went back to Avril.) I was in such a mess when she saw me. That's what finally made me decide I'd been imagining things.

I smiled. Poor Prendegast didn't know women. He was a fine-looking man even now, and must have been magnificent then. Strong, bronzed, smelling of sweat and cattle. I saw him, in my mind, on his stoep with his returns in front of him. I saw his dusty face furrowed with sweat round the eyes and nose. I saw his strong hands holding the pencil. And I saw Avril as she was then. Sleek, svelte, finished to the last degree, excited by a man like this—the silent, lonely rancher of the novelists. A man. A new type. With her husband ill and no good to her, the picture was very clear. To come into the bush was the one thing she could never have done without a pastime ; and for a woman like her there was only one kind of amusement—men.

But he hadn't seen it then, and I rather doubted if he saw it now. Tough and strong, an outdoor man, virile but at the same time what we call a gentleman. He read a lot and he'd been about before he settled here. He knew how to behave, which knife and fork to use at dinner and things like that, so that the paradox of his existence had intrigued her. Why should he live like this alone, unmarried, miles from anywhere ?

And then, like all women, she wanted power. Here was someone she could get into her power by the use of her beauty. A strong man she could either use or shatter. But I didn't say anything to him, I wanted him to go on. I was sure he would, because no one talks as much as a silent man once the silence has been broken.

" Go on," I said, " tell me the rest."

" The rest ? " he said. " All right, I'll tell you. Maybe you'll put it in a book some time . . ."

The rest (Prendegast went on), is where I made a bloody fool of myself. And of Mason. I'm not excusing myself, except that as a farmer I know very well that morality doesn't match with biology, and a girl of twenty-six, especially one like Avril, can't live without a man in her life. For two years I was that man. Mason got worse. It's only lately he's taken a turn for the better.

It began with the rides. I used to take her for rides. I knew this country like the palm of my hand. She was just friendly at first, giving me the rope I needed to hang myself. I was in love with her. I was mad about her. I could think of nothing but her.

And then one day I showed her the Bushman cave in the Berg. It's only about three miles from the house and about eight from here. You can get the horses up to within a couple of hundred yards of it and leave them tied in a thick patch of bush. Then you've got to climb for about fifteen minutes before you come to it. There's a nice Bushman painting in the cave—a giraffe in ochre yellow with black markings. The cave's as big as a small room and has a little spring on one side that's a mass of maidenhair fern. It's what you'd call a romantic spot, with a view over the low country, and the drip of water, and the ferns. I'll show it to you one day if you like.

Anyway, that's where it happened. I'd hardly got her there before she was in my arms . . . I must confess that she did not match my ardour. I did not know then, as I do now, that such was her instinctively subtle way of increasing my longing for her. It was not long before she was openly as mad about me as I was about her.

I'd never known a woman like her before. She was all woman. Sometimes I thought of the Bushmen who had made love there for hundreds, perhaps for thousands of years, till they were shot off like animals when the Boers first settled in the country. As I held

her, I often thought of it. And of men and women, and the strange things that happen between them. I felt nothing about Mason. In this sense he was dead. He wasn't a man. You couldn't take something from him that he hadn't got.

We made a bed of maidenhair fern. We took my two dogs with us, and they'd have given us notice if anyone came near. Looking back on it, it's unbelievable, but then it was the only reality. We'd meet on horseback and ride there day after day. She's a wonderful horsewoman. Learnt to ride as a child on a sheep station in Australia. That came out later when she had to manage the ranch. She'd been brought up to it, and had got out of it owing to her looks.

There'd been a good many men in her life before Mason, I gathered. But he'd found her irresistible and had married her. It would be impossible to call her immoral. Morals didn't mean anything in her. She was a beautiful animal who had made herself into a sophisticated woman of the world.

Well, that's the way it was till Max came on the scene. Maximilian Ferdinand von Freidheim. He bought Bergfontein—that's the farm on the other side of me—for its shooting. We used to laugh about him. He always wore riding breeches, boots, and a slouch hat. It was his idea of what a man should wear in Africa. He was a baron, all right—I got a friend to look him up in the *Almanach de Gotha*—and in some way related to the Hapsburgs.

He built himself a big house near the Masons' boundary. Bergfontein is L-shaped and runs right round my place. I bought it afterwards, but that's a long way ahead. As I said, we used to laugh about him, and all the time she was having an affair with him. I have no doubt that when she was with him she laughed about me. I think she told him she was just amusing herself with me, to keep suspicion from falling on him. That was her story to me about Max.

"Darling," she used to say, "it wouldn't do if I rode only with you. And besides he plays the piano so well."

Phyllis used to take him messages from Avril, and Phyllis loved his music. He had a Bechstein grand and played magnificently.

I interrupted Prendegast at that point. "I was wondering about Phyllis," I said. "She must have known what was going on."

"Some of it," Prendegast said. "She knew about me, but thought Max was a blind, so she let him make love to her."

"You mean he made love to Phyllis, too?"

"Yes," Prendegast said. "She often went over to his place on her pony—she had a little cream Basuto mare with black points—and looked very well on her. Though I must say I'd no idea she could really ride until . . ."

"Until what?" I said.

" I'm coming to that," he said. " I've left out some bits. Anyway, you've got the hang of the story now. A beautiful woman with a sick husband and two lovers that she played off one against the other, making fools of them both. It was a triangle," he said, " with Avril, me, and Maximilian. Mason was on the sidelines ; and Max had a little secret triangle of his own with Avril and Phyllis."

" Yes," I said.

" Well, I must go back a bit. You can see that money was no object with the Masons."

I said, " Yes," again, because it was obvious that money had been poured into Avalon. The house was lovely and beautifully furnished ; there was a park where they kept their brood mares, a wonderful garden, and a swimming pool two hundred feet long.

They went into it in a big way from the beginning (Prendegast said). Within a year they had ten thoroughbred mares and a grey stallion by the Syrian Prince who was by Tetrach. Avril used to ride him a lot, but not to meet me—you couldn't tie him, and he was hard to mount. But I should have realized that Phyllis knew about horses when, one day, while we were all together having tea at Avalon, Phyllis said, " I'm sure Sasha could jump a house. Just look at his quarters."

Avril said, " He won't jump."

And Phyllis said, " He'll jump wire."

" Only to get at a mare," Avril said.

" It's just that *you* can't make him," Phyllis said.

" No one can make him jump," Avril said. " He doesn't like it."

That little conversation slipped out of my mind till much later. But to get back to Maximilian. He was very rich, too. I was the poor man there. I was ranching for my living while they were cheque-book farmers, amusing themselves breeding a few horses to run in local races and running a herd of mediocre whitefaces.

Well, there it was ; and, when you come to think of it, a pretty nasty mess, too. And, like all such messes, it was filled with latent tragedy, though none of us suspected it at the time. I was even very happy in my love for Avril, and things had begun to pick up for me. A couple of good calf crops with a big percentage of heifers, and Max's hunting had cleaned out a lot of vermin.

I was sitting here where we are now, just as I was when I first saw Avril, when it happened. I was reading *The American Tragedy* —which was a bit of a coincidence—when I heard a horse galloping like hell. It was coming from the direction of Avalon, straight as a crow flies. I jumped to my feet. There were no gates that way. And then, to my astonishment, I saw Phyllis coming hell for leather

on Sasha. She was leaning over his neck and her hair was streaming out all mixed up with his mane.

My God, I thought, the fence—five barbed wires, with fourteen-pound iron standards eight yards apart, with four droppers between them. It didn't occur to me then that she must have jumped six fences before she came to this one.

I ran out just in time to see her give the stallion his head and call to him. He changed legs, gathered his quarters under him, and soared into the air. He jumped high. When he landed with his forelegs, his hind were two feet above the top wire. She never checked him, but came right on, through the rose-bushes in the garden, and only pulled up when his nose was practically on the stoep.

I went to his head. Great gusts of air came from his flaring nostrils. He was nearly black with sweat, and rubbed the thick curds, where the reins had chafed him, against my chest.

"My God, Phyl," I said, "what's up?"

She threw her leg over the horse's neck and almost fell at my feet.

I caught her by the arm. "What is it?" I said. "And what will Avril say?" Avril let no one ride that horse.

"Damn Avril," she said. "She's killed him. She shot him. She pushed the pistol right into his chest and shot him."

"Shot who?"

"Max," she said. "Avril has killed Max."

I called a boy to take the horse and put him in one of my boxes, and then I led Phyllis into the house and got her a drink of brandy. I lit a cigarette and gave it to her.

"Now tell me everything," I said.

She gave a sort of choking sob, and then, pulling herself together, said, "She shot him when she found he was my lover."

"What?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "He was my lover. We were going to be married."

"My God," I said, "But why?"

"You fool," Phyllis said. "Can't you see it?"

"Why?" I said again.

"Jealousy," she screamed. "He was *her* lover, too."

I poured myself a drink. I needed one. So she had tricked me, the way I'd tricked Mason. Phyllis was crying softly, now.

I said, the way one does at such times, just for something to say, "I never knew you could ride like that. Why, you ride better than Avril." It was odd, using her name like that, as if nothing had happened.

"Than Avril?" Phyllis said. "Why, I taught Avril to ride."

"What happened then?" I asked. "Was she accused of murder?"

" No," Prendegast said. "There was an inquest, of course, and she said she killed him in self-defence when he tried to assault her. She'd torn her clothes to prove it. She'd torn them herself after Phyllis left, and the fact that she'd shot him at such close range clinched the matter. Actually, Phyllis said, she walked right up to him and shot him. His silk shirt was all scorched with the powder blast. Anyway, he was a bad lot, Max was, and no loss to society. I advised Phyllis to say nothing because nothing would have been gained by it, and a lot of dirty linen would have come to light.

" You see, Avril had something on Phyllis. They'd been brought up together, but Phyl had been in a lunatic asylum for a while, and Avril was always threatening to let it out if she ever left her, or didn't do what she told her. That was why Phyl had never married before. This time she thought she was safe, because she'd told Max.

" But now the boot was on the other foot and she had something on Avril ; and once she got over the shock, she blossomed out. Very pretty she was, now that she'd lost that worried look. Max hadn't meant much to her, she realized afterwards, except as a way out, an escape, and it sort of eased her mind, my knowing and not being upset. But that's why we never had any children."

" No children ? "

" Yes," he said. " We wouldn't take the chance."

" You married Phyllis, then ? " I said.

" Yes," he said, " I married her, and for fifteen years we were very happy. Then she died. Come," he said, and got up. " I'll show you her grave."

We went through the garden till we came to the paddock fence ; and there, cutting into it, was a little enclosure with an iron gate. It was planted with giant aloes.

" I didn't put roses," he said, " because they'll die if they're not taken care of. But aloes go on. Nothing eats them, nothing can hurt them. And she loved them."

" Is this the place ? " I pointed to the fence.

" Yes," he said, " this is where she jumped Sasha. He died only ten years ago. Avril gave him to us as a wedding present, provided she could use him at stud when she needed him."

" What nerve," I said.

" She's got guts," he said. " All guts and no heart. Phyl had both," he said. " Plenty of both, and the light has gone out since she died." He coughed, and then he said, " Afterwards, I made a clean breast of it to Mason. About me and Avril, I mean. And he asked me if I thought he was a complete fool.

" ' You knew ? ' I said.

" ' I knew that she couldn't live without love,' Mason said. ' And I knew she'd picked on you when she decided to buy the farm.'

" ' You knew then ? ' I said.

" ' Yes,' he said. ' If it had been a city, there would have been lots of men. I didn't like that. But I was out of the running and I didn't want to lose her. Just to see her gave me pleasure—just to watch her walk, watch her move. Like a race horse.' "

At dinner that evening, Avril asked me what I'd been doing. " Have a nice ride ? " she said.

I said, " Yes, I rode over to Prendegast's."

" The silent rancher," she said.

" I'm going to see him again tomorrow," I said. " He said he'd take me to look at a Bushman drawing of a giraffe in a cave."

" I'll come with you," she said. " I'd like to see it again. I haven't seen it for years."

What nerve the woman had, I thought. She looked lovely in a white evening dress with red and green sequins on the hips. She wore a diamond star in her blue hair, and a double rope of pearls.

It was difficult to associate this well-preserved and distinguished woman with the story Prendegast had told me, but I believed every word of it. It was all there under the white dress, the sequined girdle, the pearls and diamonds, the hair-blueing and eye shadow. Eve was there, and Artemis the huntress, and the harlot and the slut that exist latently in so many women. What matters is how much of it there is. It's a matter of proportion, and Avril had too much of it. Just as she had too much beauty and too much nerve. She was as dangerous as an unsheathed sword.

I never saw the cave, because a wire came calling me back to town, but I often wish I'd stayed on to see Avril and William Prendegast, both in their fifties, looking at the scene of their romance. I've often thought of Prendegast's words : " . . . a woman like a race horse," and of Mason—a man who could look truth in the face, which is more than most men can do.

The truth. What is truth ? How much was love ? How much was cynicism on Mason's part ? What had held Avril to him ? I'd heard Prendegast's story. How different would Avril's have been, or Mason's ? And it had happened twenty-five years ago. What I had seen was the residue of life, the sediment of an old emotion, of old pain that now was just a story.

* * *

## *ALTER EGO*

*Human relations are complicated by the fact that we are always the invention of the other person.*

—ELIZABETH BIBESCO, *Haven*

# A NESTLING

**The boy knew it was there—the small bird on the dark earth, so far below the nest**

## by J. TREVOR STORY

THE boy had been in the tree half an hour before he discovered that he could not get down. Part of the time he had been fascinated by the birds' nest, and part of the time he had been enjoying the incredibly long view across the fens.

Both parts had been quite satisfactory, and well worth climbing a tree for, even though the birds' nest had, in a way, disappointed him. Instead of eggs, there had been baby birds, barely feathered, yawning for food and moving around and peering out over the side, recklessly, hungrily. And then he had got round to the view, twenty miles or more on every side ; flat lands, elevated rivers, irrigation dykes, even tiny specks fishing at Vaseford Locks and tinier specks gathering reeds for arrows in the black reed-beds towards the bay trees which hid the village but not quite the church spire. All fascinating, amazing and enjoyable, till you suddenly and sickeningly discovered that you could not get away from it. That you were thirty feet high, isolated from the world and only nine years old.

The lesson he had learned immediately was that it is easier to climb than to descend. Especially if there is some important achievement just above your head. He had but lately suffered a tragedy and this had blinded him to everything except the small nest in the crutch of branches half-way up the tree. The tragedy concerned his perfect collection of blown birds' eggs which had lain carefully packed in cotton wool in all their blue, green and speckled loveliness. He had taken it down from the loft two days ago to find that all he had was a large flat box full of blue, green and speckled dust and bits and pieces. There were certain clues which enabled him to deduce that mice had been there. Not one perfect shell remained of a whole season's collecting and swapping and even buying.

" That'll teach you to rob birds' nests," his sister had said.

This had been unfair, for he never took more than one egg from any clutch and even then only when he had none of that kind.

" Just the same," his sister had said (she was fourteen and very humane), " you don't know where your swaps come from."

Well of course a chap couldn't guarantee the integrity, or

whatever it was, of other collectors, but he reasoned that whether he had swapped for an egg or not, it would still have been taken. Anyway, his year's collection had gone for mice diet and he had to start all over again. Almost immediately, hoeing garlic from a wheat field near the artificial manure factory, he had found twelve plovers' eggs in a nest on a grassy bank. He had taken one. Blackbird, mavis, sparrow, martin, two-finger Tom had followed pretty closely. And now, with the season getting late, he had seen this nest.

The tree, as he remembered now, sitting on the stout bough and staring down, had presented no difficulties. With his young face turned expectantly upwards, his hands groping high, his joints cracking heedlessly, his toe-caps scruffing unforgivably on the rough bark, he had been blissfully unaware of height. And then at last he had scrambled up within arms' reach of the nest, to find that he was too late to prick an egg through with a thorn at either end and blow it dry. Life had come before him. Four small, big-headed but exquisite birds were in occupation.

He had stood there five minutes or more, his lips parted, his nostrils dilated in an effort to subdue the noise of his heavy breathing. Of course he was fascinated. He had seen newly-hatched birds before, scores of dozens of them, but he had not ceased to be amazed and fascinated. The boy was not aware yet of any thoughts about the meaning of life and where God was, but somewhere, unexpressed, hardly even a thought, was the deep conviction that newborn birds were a part of it all.

Twice he watched them fed by a briefly visiting parent seemingly conscious of the boy a few feet away. But still they remained open-beaked and shrill, cuffing each other, fluttering around and coming perilously near to falling from the nest. Several times the boy was terrified for them, his hand jerking involuntarily towards them, but each time it was all right. It was quite all right. The baby birds, although born not much more than a day ago, knew what they were doing and how far they could go. And that was amazing in itself.

Then the boy's legs ached, standing there on the bough, and he sat down. This meant losing sight of the baby birds and so he glanced around at the view. In no other part of the country could it be more impressive—spacious, anyway—than it was from this tree in the fens.

The tower at Soham you could see, the church at Isleham, Vaseford Locks and the anglers, a distant horse towing an unseen barge, straining forward against no more than early summer air, it seemed. The boy had lived in the Fen country most of his

life and although he had never been bored with it—take the fishing alone—it had never been as engrossing as this. It was like sitting on a relief map, a green and black map. Here and there stood a lonely windmill, sails derelict and upflung as though in supplication, or slowly turning for cattle meal.

It was all—the birds and the view and the moment—fascinating. There was no other word for it. Until you suddenly glanced round for the sun and remembered the time.

Remembering the time and the distance he had to go across the fields and along the driftways, the boy stood up for one last glance at the birds. Then, looking down, he knew he was stuck. Even without trying to climb down he knew he could not do it. Although up here the sun still poured down a tunnel of green leaves on his face and body, the bole of the tree was already lost in shadow. It was not dark exactly, down there, but it seemed at least three times the original distance. He tried just the same. For one thing he had to get to Scouts.

He hung by his hands for seconds that seemed like hours, stretching his legs, straining his feet, his toes, for the next branch below. But there was no feel of it. When he looked down, which is difficult in that position, his own body screened the part of the branch he needed for foothold. He contemplated dropping for it, knowing it was only a matter of inches. He relaxed his fingers, began to slip, remembered what had happened to Ron Chapman—and with a fierce effort scrambled back on to the bough.

He sat there, panting a little, a little faint, a little frightened. The view was no longer fascinating ; it was vanishing into evening, distance, shadow, the map vast and obscure and without horizon. Vaseford Locks were now only a few specks of white paint. He did not bother to look up at the birds' nest, although he could hear that everything there was unchanged. They at least were already safe home.

He made three more resolute attempts, each less effective than the one preceding. Finally, his strength going, he slipped, badly ; clutched a green branch which bent and whipped through his fingers ; grabbed at a dead twig that snapped and went falling to earth—down, down, down, ages before it hit the hard knotted roots. Then with a desperate, clawing, dog-paddle at the trunk and a snatching of everything green and brown he was back on the bough again, exhausted, finished, stuck.

It was then he made his special call ; a warbling yell in the throat. Usually it was loud and strong enough to bring protests from all over the village and P.C. Badcock up to see the headmaster. But now it was feeble, useless, unechoed, wasting itself in a lot of distance with nobody to hear.

But somebody did hear. Suddenly, in a silent moment of reaction and despair the call came back across the fens, the same cracked notes, warbling. The boy let it fade away then replied louder—hopefully, desperately.

Again the call came, louder. Then another call mingled with it from a different direction and soon from the village and the river and the reed-bed boys were calling to one another, quite meaninglessly and, as the boy in the tree sadly realized, as they did whenever somebody liked to start. For them it was a game. For him it was a cry of distress, like the drums of Africa, the hilltop bonfires of threatened Elizabethan England, the smoke signals of the Indians. It was a game for them because they were walking by the river, or fishing, or gathering reeds, or even swinging on their orchard gate, none of them stuck thirty feet high in a tree in the deep middle of a darkening fen.

Glooming alone amid the leaves he was startled by something that hit him on the head, a terrified squeaking, a flutter of tiny talons over his face, the brush of feathers. Then it had gone down past him, still squeaking, rattling through the leaves below. The shrill sounds stopped. There was an awful quiet on the world as though something important had died.

He thought at first it was a bat, but realized immediately afterwards that it was one of the small birds which had dropped out of its nest. What could not possibly happen had happened. One of those tiny, perfect creatures had fallen to the ground. Through anger, or ignorance, or overconfidence, or miscalculation or something.

The boy looked down but could not see the small bird on the dark earth, although he knew it was there, lying motionless, kicking perhaps, perhaps looking up at the nest, wanting to be fetched back. The baby bird, the nestling, was in a much worse predicament than he was. Something had to be done and he did not hesitate. He forgot that he was stuck.

The boy swung down by his hands, dropped perfectly to the branch below, slithered down on his stomach, felt the branch below that with his feet, stood on it, dropped again on his stomach, followed the crooked line of the bough out to where it drooped towards the ground, edged himself along, quite rapidly and confidently, still fearful only for the bird; wondering if it was in pain or whether something was threatening it, or how you could tell if a bird's bones were broken. In less than three minutes after leaving his unleavable perch he dropped lightly to the ground and went in search of the bird.

"What's happened?" his mother said, when he came in.

Something obviously had happened. He was late home on Scout night to begin with. He was white, strained, dark-eyed—though the dirt and general depreciation were no more than usual. But there was the look of a job well done about him as well. A good deed look.

"I found a nest," he said.

Without looking up from her book his sister (the humane one) said in her guardian tone, "You cruel thing."

"They were hatchies," he said. He would not allow his sister to detect that he had been at all delighted.

"Good job," his sister said.

His mother cleared a space for his tea, the boy got out his Scout uniform and his father tried the hat on as he always did. Over a hurried tea the boy told his mother about the bird falling from the nest. He forgot to mention his own predicament.

"Was the bird dead?" his sister asked.

"I don't think so." (He knew it was not even hurt, but only a little disconcerted.)

"'Don't think so'. Where is it?" His sister had laid aside her book.

The boy finished chewing a mouthful of food and swallowed hot tea.

"I put it back in the nest," he said, briefly.

* * *

## *R.S.V.P.*

The writing of Sir Henry Acland, a former Regius Professor at Oxford, was even more illegible than that of most busy doctors in the days when medical secretaries were almost unknown.

The wife of one of the Canons of Christ Church had invited Acland to dinner, but was quite unable to decipher his reply. The Canon suggested that she should take the letter to a chemist in the High, who would certainly be able to read the Regius Professor's writing in view of the many prescriptions of his he was daily called upon to dispense. The chemist was accordingly asked to interpret the letter. He retired with it to the back of the shop. Five minutes later he reappeared.

"That will be half-a-crown," he said, as he handed the lady a bottle of medicine.

SIR ARTHUR HURST, *A Twentieth-Century Physician*

# Enchanted Wood

*THE demoiselles, the deer,*
*Patterning the crust of the first fall of the year*
*Come step by step delicately down to drink,*
*Where by the greening runnel's brink*
*The glittering ambrosia sags and slips*
*Away to water, as the water runs and drips.*

*They are princesses, lost*
*From some bright roof-tree otherwhere.*
*Often at evening in the enchanted wood,*
*When the meticulous intricacies of frost*
*Branch in pale filigree on the darkening air,*
*When the beginning snowflake turns to float*
*Idly earthward without sound or haste,*
*They halt with shy and liquid glance,*
*As if they caught askance*
*In it a half-remembered silver note*
*Tuned in old time ;*
*And sometimes they have stood*
*Listening, deep in the bramble edged with rime,*
*Or curving fern-frond ice-encased,*
*Till each through glacial raindrops hears*
*The tinkling of a myriad crystal chandeliers.*

*But when the melting spring*
*Tatters the lacework on the grass,*
*When the last dazzling mass*
*Shifts from the bough, and slithering*
*With soundless crash bursts in a powdery spray,*
*Or when the novice snowdrops, young as they,*
*Troop round their little pasterns and the breeze*
*Ruffles a sheet of wan anemones,*
*By such a woodland spell their wild*
*Evasive hearts are reconciled.*
*They seek the forest pool*
*Where the drowned star of dawn grows beautiful,*
*And when the twilight planets rise*
*Pause, and reflect their gleam from innocent eyes.*
*The moon, the mistress of all magic, sees*
*Their shadowy haunt beneath the trees*
*And long beholds the minions that she loves*
*Moving in docile herd about the sleeping groves.*

DOROTHY ROWE

★An ARGOSY Short Complete Novel

# THE SPELLBINDER

## A whisper went through that magnificent assembly, "He is of the blood royal"

## by GERALD KERSH

IF I had jumped into a cab that rainy afternoon I might have lost the little man with the big black brief case. As it was, having thoroughly unnerved me by trailing me for three streets with a sheaf of folded white paper sticking out of his pocket, the little man ran me to earth near the service hatch in the Algonquin Bar. He tapped my arm just as I was ordering a whisky and soda, and startled me so that I uttered the word " stinger " with more than ordinary emphasis, at the same time turning to confront him.

" Oh, please," he said tearfully, " I am not a stinker. Do not call me names, sir."

" I wasn't calling names. What do you want ? Why have you been following me ? "

" I recognize you. I did not have the courage to accost you in the open streets. So I follow you. Please ? Forgive ? I am——"

He gave me about eight square inches of pasteboard. Printed in red and black in mighty capitals was his name :

ZOLTAN KIS

Then, smaller :

AMERICAN REPRESENTATIVE
CELEBRITY REVIEW, LTD.
9, Spike St., London, W. 1
*London, Paris, New York, Washington, Rome, Vienna, Geneva, Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, Athens.*

" You want to interview me ? " I asked, softening.

" Oh, I should be so grateful ! In Europe we are all mad for you . . . especially the girls."

" No, really ? Have a drink."

" No, please, allow me. It is such an honour, I am shy, diffident, Mr. Burl——"

" Mr. who ? "

" Mr. Burl Ives."

He cringed away from my look, like a spaniel at a reprimand.

" I am sorry . . . so sorry. I have no words ! What can I say ? What can I do . . . Mr. Hemingway ? "

"You had better be more careful," I said, with some severity. "You had better watch your step. I am neither Ernest Hemingway nor Burl Ives. Oh, incidentally, you do not pronounce the name 'Ee-vesh' in the Hungarian style, but to rhyme with 'wives'."

"That is always the trouble with me," said the little man, sighing. "Ah, yes! Fool that I am! You are Christopher Morley."

"I must be going," I said.

But then Mr. Zoltan Kis made a gesture as if his right hand had been broken at the wrist, and opened his eyes so wide and with such heartbreaking appeal that, upon my word, he really did look like a spaniel when you put on your hat and start for the door without him.

"All right, come on; sit down. Tell me what you want," I said.

Ah, then, you should have seen him jump for joy. He wore pens and pencils in both upper waistcoat pockets. Selecting the sharpest and longest of the pencils, he put it in his mouth and laid three more—red, blue and green—beside his glass, and there and then, in the Algonquin Bar, I granted a most extraordinary interview: Name. I said J. Edgar Hoover. Profession. Writer? Had anyone published any of my work to date? Why did I grow a beard? Was it because of political or artistic leanings? What did I write about? . . . Surgery! So! Most interesting.

I told him that I was a facial surgeon—but he must not breathe a word of this—a facial surgeon on his way to Washington on a secret mission. And then, flashing an old Army badge which I carry for luck: "Also, I am a high-ranking officer in the FBI, hence my false beard: and henceforward you will be watched day and night, for fear that you might whisper something of what I so indiscreetly told you. Death lurks behind every corner for you now. It may come in a puff of smoke——"

At this instant Ben Bodne, puffing a pungent cigar, leaned over to say "Hello, Mr. Kersh," and Mr. Kis knocked his beer over.

"Ah, so! You are not Doctor Hoover. You are Mr. Kersh. Oh, you are right! I must be so careful!"

"You must not be so naïve," I said. "Before getting hold of people and interviewing them, find out all you can about them from the newspaper files, look up the *Who's Who* of their country of origin. How long have you been in the newspaper business?"

"Thirty years, sir," said little Mr. Kis miserably.

I shuddered at the thought of that forlorn little man wandering for ten thousand, nine hundred and fifty days and ten thousand nine hundred and fifty nights up and down the roads of Europe, from town to town, pleading his way into jobs, and bungling his way out of them. I could see him hurtling down the slippery stone steps of some *Az Est* or whatnot, ducking an ink pot; limping back to catch a blizzard of closely written manuscript . . . flicking a little mud off the seat of his trousers, and, with a pathetic attempt at alertness, trying to swagger into the *Kurier* office, and saying: "I am Zoltan Kis, late of *Az Est*, my dear director. I have access to all the remarkable foreign celebrities at present in the city. My idea is: good, bright, lively, racy, human

stuff as full of information as an egg with meat." Then the editor says: "All right, have a go."

By some miracle he gets hold of Professor Einstein, slips up on half a dozen vital points, and turns in a story with a photograph of a prize poodle . . . and out he goes again, with the twigs of a smashed wastepaper basket clinging to his hair. His hat flies out, and the door slams. And in Budapest, Warsaw, Bucharest—for he must be multilingual—the same happens.

I TOOK poor Mr. Kis to lunch. I could never have believed that one small man could carry all the substantial food he swallowed.

"No, no," he said slyly, when I offered to introduce him to several famous men in the dining room, "you are a joker. As you say, I am too naïve. I may be a silly little man," he went on—steak-drunk, omelet-happy—"but yet, do you know, I owe my downfall not to my naïveté but to dishonesty. Through this dishonesty I almost ruined a big town as well as myself."

"Really? Better have a cigar after that."

"Thank you . . . Of the Havana!" he said to the waiter, quite fiercely. In that puny hand the fat cigar looked like a policeman's baton. "And I will tell you, a story like this might be worth thousands. But true as it is, it is so interesting that it is like fiction. May I speak in French? I speak more comfortably in French."

"Let us have the story, and keep it crisp."

"I will commence," he said, "with some little account of my early youth in the charming town of Nixburg."

"Pardon me," I said, "you will do nothing of the sort. The story, man, the story!"

"Here everybody is in a hurry, always. 'Keep it crisp, make it snappy.' In Nixburg no one was ever in a hurry.

"Imagine this charming, somnolent town on a sleepy slope that rolls down to join the River Nix, which is a tributary of the Danube. On our side of the river there were the forests, thousands of square miles of forests, pine, black as ink. On the other side, the Puszta, the Great Plain of Hungary that rolls away forever.

"It was a prosperous little town, thanks to the open-handedness of Prince Szekel, who owned the whole of Nixburg and twenty thousand square miles of forest and plain into the bargain. He also owned the great timber business, and the paper mills. Count Ferenc D'Oz was the next largest landowner, but his land was mostly grass, so that every year wild horsemen drove millions of his cattle and sheep to the slaughter-houses of the West. An ordinary gentleman, Fritz de Rosenberg, bought all the hides and started a great shoe factory. We had enough to eat—our sausages were world-famous.

"We worked during the week days and danced on holidays. And oh, oh, oh, those Nixburg girls! They danced like spinning tops until you could see all their petticoats. And on Sundays we would go to church, and afterwards eat a good meal. My father smoked his pipe and read last Friday's newspaper in a loud slow voice. And I read books in the smoky lamplight. 'Why do you

read so much, Zollie ? You will ruin your eyes,' my mother used to say. But I went on reading everything I could get hold of—dictionaries, romances, poetry, everything.

" It was your *David Copperfield* in a Hungarian translation that first aroused in me the ambition to become a great writer. My father wanted to apprentice me to a reliable trade. My mother, who was always ailing, was friendly with the apothecary ; and it was there that I started in business, rolling pills on a grooved slate, wrapping little bottles in paper and addressing packages. The work was not hard, but it was not my work. I wanted to be like David Copperfield . . . Oh, dear me !

" Well, I was launched on my journalistic career by a runaway horse. Somehow, a very fine but extremely ferocious wolfhound ran away from Count D'Oz's kennels, got into town and worried a horse. The horse ran away and, having knocked down several pedestrians, ran into a café, causing a gentleman to die of heart failure. Not knowing to whom the wolfhound belonged, a policeman shot the animal on the spot, and I, who was delivering some jars of eye ointment, heard a rugged old forester, who had come into town for the day to get drunk, say : ' Ah, that's Count D'Oz's Hektor. A brute. He ought to have been shot long ago.'

" At this, I knew I had what they call a scoop. I ran as fast as my legs would carry me to the office of the *Nixburg Kurjer*. I burst in and demanded to see Mr. Knock, the editor in chief. ' Sir,' I gasped, ' a wolfhound bit a horse on Hunyadi Janos Street, and the horse bolted into the Café Cosmopolitan, frightening an old gentleman to death ! '

" ' So what ? '

" ' Ah, but I have inside information. Mr. Editor, that wolfhound was the property of Count D'Oz ! '

" That made all the difference ; for, you see, the count and the prince were always at loggerheads . . . some family feud concerning the right to hunt over a certain strip of forest . . . an affair of frontiers. The *Kurjer* was partly subsidized by the prince. The opposition paper, the *Independent*, was in the pocket of the count, and naturally the two editors lost no opportunity of going for each other. So Mr. Knock gave me a ***krone*** and told me that I was a good boy. He said that if ever I heard of any interesting little item, no matter what, I was to come to him at once, and if my news was red hot there would certainly be one or even two ***kronen*** for me.

" So, to keep it crisp, as you say, after three years I became a reporter on the *Kurjer*, and was a well-known figure in Nixburg with my pencil and notebook and my high stiff collar. I was in love with a girl named Magda. I was quite happy—light tan suit, Tyrolean hat, brown boots, a cigar—a person of consequence.

" And then Mr. Knock picked up some accursed Yankee newspaper in which imported ploughshares had been wrapped, and took it into his head that he wanted interviews. Nothing else would do. Three times a week this foolish man insisted on an exclusive interview with a well-known person."

" Then I knew what misery was. The great east-bound expresses used to stop for twenty minutes at Nixburg, and then you would find me on the platform running after anyone who looked distinguished. The strain was such that I began to make mistakes, some of them pardonable ; as, for example, when, seeing a big American with a moustache and a fur coat talking to some lesser Americans on the platform, I ran up to him and said : ' If you please, sir, are you not President Theodore Roosevelt en route incognito for the Bosporus ? '

" He said, ' You bet ; and these are just a few of my Secretaries of State '—and gave me two cigars. I wrote it up and it was printed. I shook in my shoes when I remembered that Theodore Roosevelt was no longer President. Still, nobody noticed that.

" I was naïve, innocent, and God protects the innocent. But when I stooped to deceit, came the *débâcle*. It happened one Thursday in midsummer. For three awful days in that sweltering heat I had loitered about the station. There was nobody whom I could even pretend to recognize.

" Manufacture celebrities . . . no, I could not honestly do that. But it might be ethical to interview a genuine celebrity, as it were, in my mind's eye. Who ? I went to the buffet and had a beer. I had some difficulty in attracting the attention of the barman. He was so deeply engrossed in a paper-backed novel that he had no eyes for anything but the greyish printed page before him. I looked closer and saw that he was reading *When the Blood Boils*, by Bull Penhaligon. I remember slapping the zinc counter so that I hurt my fingers—I had an inspiration.

" The barman put down his book reluctantly and, drawing a beer, said, ' I've just got to the part where the girl bites the man's finger to the bone. Now that's what I call a writer, this here Bull Penhaligon. D'you know what ? I'm a poor man, but if I were rich, I'd buy every word he ever wrote, and lock myself in a room with a few cases of beer and read Bull Penhaligon till the cows came home ! '

" I said, ' What would you say if he came to Nixburg ? '

" ' Some hopes,' said the barman.

" ' You wait and see, my friend,' I said, with a sardonic smile, and left the buffet. There and then I conceived a plan for which I was later to suffer most bitterly. The barman had put it into my mind : *Penhaligon Comes to Nixburg !* But perhaps you have never heard of Bull Penhaligon ? "

KIS looked at me with mute inquiry, and I nodded. I had, indeed, heard of Bull Penhaligon, one of the most popular sensational novelists of his time. He wrote ninety-three novels at the rate of three a year. He was translated into sixteen languages. He was what they used to call " outspoken," and " frank " ; he had a knack of snatching the ice of purity out of passion's furnace just in the nick of time. He stopped at nothing.

In *The Ball and Chain : A Tale of Marriage*, for example, the heroine was in a truly dismal plight—she had been kidnapped and spirited away to a Martello tower on an unapproachable coast. The

villain came in, leering, locked the door, pocketed the key, threw off an opera cloak lined with crimson satin, and advanced. His moustaches tickled her ears ; she felt his burning breath, perfumed with cachous, on her throat. She was a goner if ever there was one. So she fell on her knees and prayed. The villain was struck by lightning forthwith and all ended well.

It is easy to laugh, now, at this kind of thing, but remember Marie Corelli, remember Ouida—all-time record breakers when it came to sales—who froze the marrowbones and melted the hearts of our mothers with their stuff and nonsense. And where are they now ?

So passed out of memory the phenomenally popular Bull Penhaligon. But this writer, at the time of which Mr. Kis was speaking, was remarkable not only for his sales ; he actually avoided personal publicity. Bull Penhaligon granted no interviews, ignored requests for autographs and answered no letters. His photograph had never been published.

YOUNG KIS concluded, therefore, that he was on an easy thing. When the last eastbound train rolled out of Nixburg station, he went to the waiting room and wrote furiously for half an hour.

" What I said might be denied, but the odds were a thousand to one against its being disproved ; because, you see, in order to disprove what I wrote, Penhaligon would have to come out into the open, in which unlikely event I proposed to play a desperate card, and go to one of the great agencies, say Reuters or Havas, and say : ' I am the man who forced Penhaligon's hand. Employ me ! '

" Now what did Bull Penhaligon look like ? I saw him through the beer haze as a man in the prime of life, strongly built, with delicate yet powerful hands, unadorned with rings. His clothes would be of some sober colour, although, as a concession to the heat, he might wear a white linen waistcoat. Needless to say, his linen would be immaculate. He would wear a comfortable turned-down collar.

" Yes, but what the devil would sprout out of this collar ? A manly neck, obviously, and a head. The only word for the head of a Penhaligon is leonine . . . romantic writers do not cut their hair short, or did not in my day. His face, for the sake of congruence, must be strong and square, handsome but stern, remorseless yet gentle—the face of a man who has been a bit of a dog in his time, but has got over it through a regimen of prayer, fasting, spinach, a cold bath at least once or twice a day. Had he a love life ? A wife ? At the mention of this a shadow would fall athwart his brow, and he would light a cigarette. As the match flared up I would see his piercing grey eyes mist over with sadness . . .

" And what was he doing in Nixburg ? He saw the lamps lighting up along Hunyadi Janos Street and he thought of an avenue of stars . . . here a troubled soul might find rest. He was off to another part of the country, gathering material for a novel about the Carpathians—incidentally, the only place, except the Congo, that he hadn't written about—but he hoped to return to Nixburg . . .

" So I wrote my article, not without misgivings. The editor was delighted. He covered the whole front page with my interview, with headlines : *Special ! At Last It Is Achieved ! Exclusive ! First Recorded Interview With Bull Penhaligon Secured by Kurjer !* Next day Nixburg was in a state of turmoil. People left their shops to follow me up and down the street to ask all kinds of silly questions about Bull Penhaligon. How did he part his hair ? I had omitted to mention this in my article. Did he wear brown boots ? You know.

" I became exhilarated, and talked all kinds of nonsense, so that when I went to bed I really began to believe in my own fabrication. I awoke on Saturday morning with an abominable headache for which my mother brewed me some horrid tisane. I was sipping this when a boy came running from the office, plastered with printer's ink, and dripping with sweat.

" ' Mr. Kis ! Mr. Kis ! ' he gasped. ' Quick, for the love of heaven ! Somebody is asking for you in the office ! '

" ' Who ? '

" ' Bull Penhaligon!

" I cannot describe my feelings at that moment. I can only say that it was as if I had accidentally put the lighted end of this cigar in my mouth, and, in the resultant convulsion, swallowed it.

" To keep it crisp : I went to the office. Old Knock and the assistant editor were standing to attention. A deep, resonant voice, in heavily accented Hungarian, said, ' Ah, this is my young friend, I see ! '

" I looked to my left and saw—line for line, detail for detail—the man I had described in my article . . . Bull Penhaligon, smiling and holding out an elegant but masculine white hand in greeting.

" From outside came a noise like a boiling pot. A crowd was collecting. In an instant that empty, hot street had become black with people, struggling, like flies in a saucer of honey, to catch a glimpse of the fabulous newcomer.

" ' Is there a way out at the back ? ' asked Penhaligon . . . ' Yes ? Then I will go out that way. You, my friend,' he said to me in English, ' will show me the way back to my hotel, the Franz Josef. Oh, dear, oh, dear, in disclosing my identity I have broken the rule of a lifetime, and I suppose I shall have to pay for it.'

" So we left by the back door, and quickly I ran ahead of him along the alley that led to a side street. He admonished me, ' In a crisis, my friend, always walk slowly. More people have been caught simply because they were seen running than you might ever believe ! '

" Obviously, like so many of his heroes, this man had had occasion to keep a cool English head in many a crisis. I followed his instructions like someone in a dream. We beat the crowd to the Franz Josef by half a minute. The Franz Josef had an elevator that worked with a rope. For us, the proprietor himself operated it.

" ' Where are you taking me ? ' asked Penhaligon in German.

" Tugging like a Volga boatman, the hotelier wheezed, ' I have taken the liberty of transferring Your Excellency's luggage to the

Imperial suite. I could not lie easy in my bed, thinking of Your Excellency in a common man's room.'

" The Imperial suite was all plush and gold mirrors. There was an oil painting of the Emperor. It had a bathroom all to itself.

" Penhaligon said, ' Bring us a bottle of Nierstein, the best you have, ice-cold. Now leave us.'

" I was still thunderstruck. I managed to say, ' But, sir . . . Your Excellency . . . this is some kind of miracle. I do not understand——'

" ' What is it that you do not understand, Mr. Kis ? Oh, and incidentally, how did you learn to speak English so well ? '

" ' I learned it out of a correspondence course, secondhand. Also French and German, Excellency . . . I mean, that interview.'

" ' I thought it was very sensitive, Zoltan '—he called me Zoltan—' highly sensitive. It brought me back on the return express. You have the makings of a very fine writer, I think. I am not proficient in Hungarian. The few words I speak I learned with a view to exploring your Carpathian Mountains, which I propose to paint in as background for a novel I have in mind, *In the Black Mountains : A Novel of the Carpathians*. Perhaps you will help me . . . be my dragoman, my interpreter ? '

" I said, ' But, Your Excellency . . . I didn't interview you ! '

" ' If you did not, then who did ? ' His great grey eyes held mine. Concentric circles of coloured light seemed to come out of those eyes, in ripples, so to speak. ' I was most certainly interviewed either by you or your twin on Thursday night when I stepped out of the train to look at the valley.'

" I TOLD him the whole story with an open heart. He nodded and said, ' Yes. A similar thing happened to me one night in London when I was writing *Frozen Passion : A Tale of the Ice Age*. I was baffled, and exhausted with overwork, so I lay down to sleep. When I awoke, I found that I had written twenty pages of descriptive matter, better than anything I had written before. My unconscious mind had been at work, you see. Drink a glass of cold wine. Strictly in moderation it is very good for you.'

" I drank, and everything became clear. I had only imagined that I had concocted that interview ! It stood to reason. I had run off the platform as the train left and written it from memory in the waiting room—it was as simple as all that.

" By this time the noise outside was such that the proprietor had to knock twice before Penhaligon heard him and told him to come in. What with perspiration and anxiety, the old fellow seemed to be wringing himself out like a cheesebag. He said, ' Excellency . . . please . . . the populace ! The whole of Nixburg is in the square. I beg you . . . step onto the balcony and say a word to them, something like Au revoir, or God bless you . . . or they will storm the hotel.'

" I went with Penhaligon onto the balcony. The people were there in their thousands. Most of them had read and wept over the works of Bull Penhaligon, but a very considerable number could not read or write, and had never even heard of him—these last were the

noisiest of all. ' Penhaligon ! Penhaligon ! ' they shouted, not knowing whether he was the new Emperor or something to eat free of charge. Then, when Penhaligon appeared with outstretched arms, such a silence fell that you could hear the twittering of the swallows. He made them a little speech in his halting Hungarian . . . but in what a voice ! It amounted to : ' God bless you, thank you, disperse peacefully, go about your business, and we will see more of each other.'

" The crowd was beginning to disperse when something else happened. Up the avenue on the left, the Avenue Casimir, an immense white motor car was being driven at breakneck speed. The proprietor said, ' It is the Count D'Oz's Benz ! Your Excellency, the Count D'Oz is coming . . . Oh, and oh, my God ! Look, look over there, on the Avenue Hapsburg ! '

" We looked and saw an immense carriage drawn by four magnificent white horses and followed by two mounted attendants. ' That is His Highness, the Prince Szekel's carriage ; they will meet in my hotel ! Excellency, I am a ruined man ! '

" But Bull Penhaligon smiled and said, ' Oh, I have heard some talk of the blood feud between the D'Ozes and the Szekels. A gentleman told me all about it on the train. I had hoped to embody some such material in my novel. This is better luck than I had dared to hope for.'

" The car had been delayed by a crowd that blocked the avenue, so that the carriage drew a little ahead. Penhaligon strolled back into the room, but I with my reportorial instincts could not tear myself away. I called out a commentary, ' The count's car is moving again . . . I think there's a body in the street . . . No, it's getting up. The prince's carriage is cutting across the square. The coachman is lashing the horses . . . The count's car cuts in. They are here, Excellency, simultaneously—a dead heat ! They are out ! They stand side by side, ignoring each other. Neither will say " After you." They enter the hotel abreast ! '

" Then I ran back to join the master, who was smiling his sad, enigmatic smile. And, then, somehow they came together into the room.

" The prince was a courtly gentleman with one of those fine-drawn, high-boned Magyar faces, and eyes like knives. He was accustomed to certain civilized preliminaries. Not so the count, who had something of the oafish Slav in him, and always came straight to the point—a brute of few words, and those few disagreeable to listen to, for he had a voice like the horn of his murderous car.

" He said, ' The great Bull Penhaligon ? Welcome to Nixburg. Honoured to have you. What are you doing in this lousy hotel ? Don't unpack. Come up to the castle. I'll invite the whole countryside and give you the time of your life.'

" Then the prince had his say. ' I am sure, sir, that you must be hot and tired and much harassed by the importunities of the filthy mob and, no doubt, by the unwarrantable intrusion of certain coarse persons who are old and ugly enough to know better. Will you not

repose yourself at the palace for a little ? The princess fainted when she heard of your coming. She has every one of your books, specially bound in perfumed morocco. Pray do us the honour.'

" The count turned on him then : ' I spoke first, Szekel ! '

" ' Who is this person ? . . . Oh, you, eh, D'Oz ? . . . Mr. Penháligon, has this fellow been pestering you ? If so, allow me to inform the proprietor. It is disgraceful that there should be at large creatures so devoid of sensibility that——'

" ' Szekel, are you referring to me ? '

" ' There are no two such boors in Mr. Bull Penhaligon's rooms, I believe ? '

" The count raised a hand that resembled his chauffeur's bearskin glove. The prince also raised a hand—thin, veinous, and somehow even more dangerous-looking than the count's hairy paw. Then Bull Penhaligon stepped between them. And said, in a smooth, easy voice, ' Gentlemen, be seated; here comes the wine,' and these two terrible men sat down, quiet as mice.

" Did Penhaligon hypnotize them ? I don't know. I don't think so. I believe that it was the awe, the reverence he had inspired in their breasts for over thirty years that made them come to heel as soon as they heard his voice. So they drank their wine, mastering their rage ; the count snorting, the prince quivering.

" At last Penhaligon said, ' Gentlemen, I am overwhelmed by your hospitality, and gratefully accept your invitations.'

" ' Whose ? ' growled the count.

" ' Mine, of course ? ' said the prince.

" ' Both,' said Penhaligon. ' Both—on one condition : that you forget this wretched quarrel of yours which has brought terror and misery to the countryside for so many generations, and we eat and drink, all three of us, at the same table in peace and harmony.'

" You should have seen their faces. The count's turned purple and the prince's grey. They stared wildly at Penhaligon, who, quite unmoved, continued. He spoke gravely, like a father to children. He proved ineluctably that only children or imbeciles would pursue such an absurd quarrel. Magnates, millionaires, both of them, and fine men into the bargain . . . and to waste themselves on an endless argument over a strip of forest which neither of them needed or hunted over, if at all, out of mere infantile spite.

" He suggested that this strip of forest be known henceforward as the D'Oz-Szekel Forest, and that once a year the two families should hunt together there to celebrate the ending of the feud. If they would agree to this, he was theirs to command. If not, he would set foot neither in the house of Szekel nor in that of D'Oz.

" To my surprise, it was the count who made the first move. He bellowed : ' He is right ! What do I care for the deadest strip of scrub in Hungary ? I've got game enough of my own to last me a thousand years. So have you, Szekel. It's a damn silly business, anyway. Let's do as he says, I say . . . Think of the binges we can have in each other's houses ! ' And he licked his lips.

" The prince said, ' I have not quarrelled with you over that poor

bit of forest, D'Oz. With me it has been more a matter of pride, dignity.'

" ' Same here,' said the count.

" The prince continued, ' Then let us declare the feud at an end . . . Only I suggest that by right of seniority my name comes first, so that the strip be known as the Szekel-D'Oz Forest.'

" The count said : ' Wait a bit.'

" But Bull Penhaligon chimed in, ' Let us call it the Forest of Peace.' And the two old enemies kissed each other then and there, and immediately started to discuss plans for an immense banquet—something in the ancient Roman style—three days at the castle, three days at the palace, and goodness knows what besides.

" The count went to the great mirror over the fireplace and, screwing off an immense diamond ring, wrote ' Peace ! D'Oz.' He handed his ring to Szekel, who wrote his name, too, managing to squeeze it in a little higher up before he passed the ring to Penhaligon, who scratched his name in bold letters. When he tried to return the ring to the count, D'Oz growled, ' Keep it, sir, please . . . souvenir.'

" While Penhaligon stood amazed, the prince took off a ring set with a most glorious red stone and held it out, saying, ' This is a perfect alexandrite, the rarest stone in the world. It is bright red by day, and bright green by night. It was given to my mother by the Czar of all the Russias. I insist on your accepting it as a memento.'

" We went downstairs. Another immense crowd had gathered, hoping to hear pistol shots, and had stayed to watch a bloody battle between the count's chauffeur and the prince's coachman. The count seized his chauffeur by the throat and kicked him into the car, shouting, ' Peace, it is peace, you dirty dog ! Take that ! And take that ! Must I knock it into your thick head ? Peace, peace, peace !'

" The prince belaboured his coachman with the butt of the horse-whip, snarling, ' Never dare to offer violence to any employee of my friend Count D'Oz, you swine, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life, and that inch also ! ' The flabbergasted multitude watched while the count and the prince embraced, before they drove away, promising to call for Penhaligon on the following day. The man had worked a miracle !

" Penhaligon wrote a long telegram, addressed to one Papke in Budapest. It was written in code, so that I could not understand what it said. Having made sure that I had sent it, he gave me five hundred *pengö* and told me to hire a dress suit with all the trimmings.

" ' I hate these vanities,' he said, ' but when in Rome, do as Rome does . . . within reason. Be here with your bag packed at nine o'clock tomorrow morning.'

" Oh, dear me, the trouble I had with that dress suit ! There was not one in town small enough to fit me—not with tails, that is. At last I found one in Kuhn's pawnshop. It fitted me to perfection. I strutted like a bantam until, thinking no doubt to please me, he told me that it was an unredeemed pledge that had belonged to a spring-

board acrobat out of a circus that had visited Nixburg five years previous. In this very suit, the first time he put it on, he broke his neck.

"No, I never was an imposing figure of a man. Even in full evening dress with lapels of the finest French velvet, I still looked like something escaped from a jar of alcohol in a pathological museum. Yet I was sublimely happy as I packed my little Gladstone bag. My mother ran after me, bless her, clucking like a chicken, pecking at my cheek with her lips and scratching bits of fluff off my sleeves. My father, who was a bit of a Social Democrat on the quiet, warned me to beware of temptation; these aristocratic women stopped at nothing. My sweetheart, Magda, wept for joy and kissed me. That was the first kiss she had ever given me. And the last.

"IF you want a description of the Szekel Palace, you can consult the guide books. The prince's father had been a crony of the mad king of Bavaria and had built onto the ancestral palace an immense wing in imitation of that crazy palace of Neuschwanstein—complete with artificial lake. And, like Ludwig II, the prince's papa had himself drawn about on this lake by great clockwork swans, he sitting in a sort of scallop shell, dressed in silver armour, while an orchestra played the noisier bits of Wagner. That is how he met his end—fell overboard, intoxicated by too much old wine and new music, and drowned before they could fish him out.

"Bull Penhaligon had a bedroom of pink marble with a bed in which you could have slept fourteen crosswise. I had to climb on a chair to sit on the edge of it. My room, which adjoined his—he insisted on having me close to him all the time—was scarcely less magnificent.

"My best suit, which seemed so smart in the cafés along Hunyadi Janos, did seem a little out of place in the gardens of the palace, where the incoming guests strolled and smoked among the strutting peacocks on the lawn or sipped iced drinks in the shade of ancient cedar trees. I panted for the moment when I might put on my dress suit and so, in uniform as it were, pass as one of the nobility.

"Poor me! I did not know how to tie a bow. Penhaligon found me in tears with a strip of crumpled linen in my hand. But he soothed me with a touch. Under his wonderful fingers that unsavoury object became a great white butterfly. And I had forgotten to purchase studs. He gave me a pair, plain gold, very gentlemanly. Looking at him, I knew that I should never, never look like a gentleman. His dress coat had been cut by men who worked for emperors. In his quiet magnificence he made even the prince seem stiff and theatrical.

"All the men were wearing their decorations—they were like Christmas trees with their stars, crosses and other European orders. Penhaligon wore one decoration only, but that one was worth all the rest put together, for it was the glorious star of the Order of the Bath. It blazed on his breast, a Betelgeuse, shining serene among the chip-diamond star dust of the lesser orders.

" They began to whisper, these people, who read nothing but the *Almanach de Gotha* and other guides to aristocratic pedigree, 'Observe. He wears the Bath. This, then, accounts for the veil under which he has moved all these years. He is of the blood royal. Penhaligon is only a *nom de plume*.'

" After that, in addition to worshipping him—which is easy; anyone may worship anything—they began to feel socially somewhat inferior to him; a very different kettle of fish. They squirmed in ecstasies of self-abasement, thirsting, with swollen tongues, for some title to address him by. But no. He would be nothing but Mr. Bull Penhaligon. An American billionaire said, 'Guess I'll call you Bull-Pen.' He replied, 'Nothing could please me more!'

" It was arranged that I should dine first, in a pretty little room all to myself. Penhaligon needed me at his side, he said, and it was not expedient that I be squeezed in at table between him and the princess or the countess; so I was to stand within beckoning distance of his chair for the duration of the dinner to help him with his Hungarian in case of emergency.

" I waited until the guests were seated and took up my post within the range of Bull Penhaligon's vision. I stood—I nearly said dwarfed by all this grandeur, but dwarfed is not the word. I was part of this magnificence, in a manner of speaking. My weak eyes became keen.

" I was fascinated, for example, by the tremulous chin of wicked Count Drakulescu, bobbing over the Order of the Holy Ghost—Drakulescu, who was supposed to have sold his soul to the devil for an infallible system at roulette and was said to be nearly a hundred years old . . . I gazed with admiration at the superb bosom of the Baroness Marmora, who, as rumour had it, was in love with one of her stable lads . . . and at the buffalo head of the Russian Prince Chorazin, who was on his way home after three years of exile on the Riviera—it had something to do with his breaking somebody's neck in an argument over a superfluous ace of diamonds.

" There was the princess, our hostess, who looked like one of those hairy toy terriers sprinkled with precious stones. Competing with her for Penhaligon's attention, the Countess D'Oz sat and grinned like a skull, while the count, who was already half drunk, was laughing his raucous laugh at one of his own jokes, at which the prince, to whom he bellowed it, was politely nodding and obligingly smiling from a distance. Ah, that was the night of my life! It was worth all it cost me . . . perhaps.

" The dinner ended and the Emperor's health drunk, and then the glasses broken, the prince and the count embraced in front of their guests and solemnly swore eternal friendship. Yes, after three hundred years, the houses of D'Oz and of Szekel were united. By what agency? By the miraculous agency of the great and noble gentleman whose health they were to drink, the guest of honour, the astounding individual who chose to be known as Bull Penhaligon. Two hundred people rose to their feet. Yet Bull Penhaligon, quietly seated, appeared taller than they. When they were seated, he rose; and then he began to speak.

"YOU have in America a phrase: spellbinder, meaning a man who, by the skilful use of his tongue, can so play on your emotions as to hold you, in spite of yourself, as it were by magic. I have heard several such—men who talked the most appalling balderdash; it offended every grey cell of intelligence; and yet I was compelled to listen and, in the end, even applaud.

"There are many such men in the world. They can take a stale old story and make it fresh and new. They could tell you the tale of Cinderella in such a manner that, when they paused for breath in the middle, you would tremble with impatience to know what was coming next. They put their dreams into your head, these Pied Pipers . . . Yes, I have met them. Some of them were criminals, others were idealists, and others again were curiously compounded of criminality and idealism . . . most dangerous.

"But I have never heard any man speak as Bull Penhaligon spoke in the prince's palace that hot night . . . so still that the flames of the candles might have been painted on air. I remember that an owl hooted—that was all—and then it was as if the very leaves of the forest stopped whispering to listen to that wonderful golden voice of Penhaligon speaking of love and understanding.

"He touched lightly upon the ancient feud of the prince and the count. For centuries, blood had flowed and generation after generation had lived and died in bitterness and hate—yes, and fear: fear, which is born of hate . . . hate, which is born of misunderstanding. And suddenly, this became a parable.

"Penhaligon's voice shook with strong emotion; it sounded like a great gong. . . .

"Now the enemies were reconciled and they were one; they were lighter, freer, happier than they had ever been. Understanding the trivial nature of their quarrel, they had instinctively forgiven each other and the quarrel had ceased to exist. They had come, in their mutual forgiveness, somewhat closer to God—Who, understanding all, ultimately forgives all. We were all in need of forgiveness, because we were too proud to allow ourselves to be understood, and too vain to humble ourselves as one had to humble oneself in order to understand . . .

"And so Bull Penhaligon spoke of his mission. He had thought much, he said; studied much, travelled much, and seen much that made his heart sore. Now, with the co-operation of several great and noble personages, he was entering upon the last phase of a hard and, he hoped, not ill-spent life. He had made the name of Bull Penhaligon beloved by high and low alike all over the world. This name, and all that went with it, he had sworn henceforward to devote to the establishment of a vast World League of Understanding! Its headquarters were to be in Switzerland, and there was to be a centre in every town in the civilized world.

"The League would aim at the establishment of mutual understanding between man and man, first of all, and ultimately between nation and nation. This, as everybody would see, must necessarily be so, since true peace is in the spirit. What was race hatred but a

sour accumulation of blind, inherited prejudice—such as had poisoned the existences of the D'Ozes and Szekels for three centuries ?

" He concluded : ' Yet there was a sweetness on both sides of that innocent strip of forest which vanity and pride turned into a bloody frontier. One handclasp across that boundary, one touch, one *willing* touch in *common understanding* . . . and all the *loveliest* and *best* in Szekel and D'Oz has run together ! And everyone is *happier* ! And, therefore, *better* for it ! So the League of Understanding must be built, not by cold legislation, but by the willing hands of individuals who, seeking understanding, hope in their turn to be understood . . . Not through imposed taxation, but through warm-hearted individual charity—the widow's mite, the beggar's farthing, the magnate's cheque—so long as it is given with goodwill.'

" ' I call upon you,' he said, ' in the name of humanity to support the League of Understanding—to open your hearts—and to give, *to give* ! '

" He sat down abruptly as the applause broke out. It went on for five minutes. When, at last, it died, the prince, quivering with emotion, rose and cried : ' Let us support the League of Understanding ! Here are a hundred thousand *pengö* '—and he threw down a fat wallet. The count threw down his wallet also, and growled : ' The same here ! ' (I ought to tell you that when noblemen visited each other then, they generally carried very large sums of money about them, because there was almost always some heavy gambling at *chemin de fer* towards the end of the evening). And then there was a great slapping noise, like emptying a basket full of flounders as, all around that great horse-shoe table, men dashed down their wallets.

" It was mass hysteria. The princess unfastened a flashing diamond collar and, dropping it into Penhaligon's lap, cried : ' Take ! I want to give ! '

" Thereupon the countess unhooked a triple rope of pearls and put them down on the table in front of Penhaligon, crying : ' I want to be understood ! I want to understand ! '

" Then the other women began to take off brooches, rings, necklaces, and bracelets, screaming : ' Take ! ' : . . ' Let me give ! ' . . . ' It is from the heart—I want to be understood ! '

" The prince said a word to a stalwart lackey who picked up a great silver-gilt champagne tub and walked stolidly round the table receiving the offerings. Only the Count Draculescu shook his head sourly, and the Baroness Marmora simply sneered . . . she hadn't the slightest desire to be understood. But I tell you the effect was such that I actually found myself fumbling in my pocket for some change when the tub went past, half full of money and jewels that looked like broken-up rainbows.

" Penhaligon said quite simply : ' God bless you. I did not expect such a beautifully spontaneous response. All offerings will be duly acknowledged. Thank you.' '

" Penhaligon called me and said, ' Zoltan, see that this good fellow carries these offerings to my room, and wait for me there.'

" He was with me in a minute or two. He threw the contents of

the tub onto his bed. It was as if all the stars had fallen out of heaven, but he appeared unconcerned. He threw open a small black valise and tossed the gems in pell-mell, like so many handfuls of gravel; locked the case and dropped it nonchalantly to the floor.

"Then he turned his attention to the gold and the paper money. He took from a drawer a wide canvas belt with deep pockets. Into these pockets he carefully packed the great bundles of thousand-*pengö* notes. There must have been two or three million there in hard cash. 'One learns to be careful with these elusive bits of paper,' he said, and, pulling out his shirt, buckled the belt tightly about his waist.

"Even with his shirt hanging out he looked noble—he would have looked noble in long underpants of red flannel. In a second he was himself again, unruffled, immaculate. He said, 'Let us go down, Zoltan. Keep close to me: I may need you.'

"We went down to the ballroom. Comparatively few couples were dancing. Most of the guests had formed little groups and were talking excitedly of brotherhood and understanding over liqueur glasses. Only the Baroness Marmora stood aloof.

"When she saw Penhaligon she smiled her one-sided smile and flashed her green eyes, and said, 'Mr. Penhaligon, were you in earnest?'

"'In deadly earnest, Baroness.'

"'But you were talking rot, piffle! Understanding! People don't want to be understood.'

"'No, Baroness, it is that they prefer not being understood to being imperfectly understood.'

"'Rubbish! We are all animated masks. Only neurotics with diseased brains even hope to be understood . . . and a pretty penny Doctor Freud is making out of them in Vienna. Mr. Penhaligon, you are either a fool or a crook . . . and in my opinion you are no fool. Why don't you ask me to dance?'

"I watched them dance, breathless. I was vaguely aware of some kind of disturbance outside. A door opened, and the major-domo, frightfully agitated, glided like a terrified snake to the prince's secretary and whispered in his ear. The secretary approached the prince, drew him aside, and, with gesticulations painful to see, seemed to gasp at him. The prince pushed him away and strode out. The band was playing *Donau Wellen*, I remember, when the prince came back and took hold of the Count D'Oz, and said three words, at which the count became purple and followed him, growling, out of the ballroom.

"The waltz ended and Penhaligon conducted the baroness to a seat. They seemed to be getting along like a house on fire. I was standing by, as instructed, when the prince and the count came in. The prince said, 'A thousand apologies, my dear friend. May we interrupt you, only for a few minutes? It is a matter of some little importance . . . If the baroness will excuse you?'

"It would be a pleasure, said Penhaligon, if the baroness would excuse him; and, beckoning to me, he followed the prince and the

count, I trotting at their heels. They led us to the library, a great shadowy room.

"THE prince locked the door and then said, 'Mr. Penhaligon, I do not know how to say this. But there are two men here from the police. They absolutely insist on seeing you. It is, of course, a case of mistaken identity. They say that you are . . . in effect, someone else.'

"'How can I be?' asked Bull Penhaligon, smiling. 'Show them in, my dear prince; let us confront them.'

"The count opened a door and out of a smaller room came two stern-faced men, one big and burly, with a clipped moustache; the other thin and pale, with a very sharp pair of eyes. 'Introduce yourselves,' said the count, in his most brutal manner.

"The big one said, 'Inspector Duvivier, Police Judiciaire, Paris.' The other said, 'Detective-Inspector Haug, Secret Police, Vienna.'

"The count said, 'Well, and this is Mr. Bull Penhaligon. Apologize for disturbing him, and go to hell.'

"'Allow me,' said Inspector Duvivier, taking up a lamp. He held it close to Penhaligon's face. Both he and Haug gazed at Penhaligon for a long half-minute. Duvivier took from an inner pocket an index card upon which were stuck two photographs. I noticed, also, two blocks of fingerprints. Haug produced a similar card.

"'You will recognize me when you see me again,' said Penhaligon, with a smile.

"'There isn't going to be any again, I think,' said Duvivier, taking out a piece of paper and a pair of handcuffs. 'George Lassiter, alias Edouard de Nerval, I have a warrant for your arrest on a charge of bank robbery. There is also a little matter of escape from Devil's Island. They've been asking all over for you, George—you left them without explanation with seventeen years still to go. That was inconsiderate of you, George. Come on—out with your handiepandies!'

"His tone was jocular, but Haug was like a butcher's saw made articulate. He said, 'George Lassiter, alias Sir Frederick Pynne, alias Sean O'Brien, alias James Boswell, I have a warrant also for your arrest on eleven counts including mail robbery, embezzlement and obtaining money under false pretences. Keep still.'

"Penhaligon said to the prince, 'Really, this is too much. Please have these men thrown out.'

"The count said, 'With pleasure.'

"'Just a moment, if you please,' said Duvivier; 'perhaps you gentlemen will recognize these photographs?'

"The photographs on the index card were of a middle-aged, hairless man with a powerful, crafty face; not a bit like Penhaligon.

"'You are drunk, you lousy dogs! Get out!' roared the count.

"But Haug said, 'Please look again'—and stepping forward he seized Penhaligon by the hair and tugged sharply. The hair came off.

There, in place of my lion, stood a bald eagle, glaring about him with wide, unblinking eyes. Haug stuffed the wig into his pocket.

"Duvivier then said, 'Further distinguishing marks and characteristics: knife scar . . . stomach, left side; puckered bullet scar . . . right thigh. And if you take off the gentleman's collar, you will find tattooed a dotted line encircling the neck, with an inscription, "Cut along the dotted line" . . . Going to take your collar off, George?'

"'Shall we undress you here or at the station?' asked Haug.

"Penhaligon sighed—a terrible sigh that seemed to come from the depths of his soul. It was horrible, then, to see how that man had changed in a matter of seconds. The nobility was gone from his face—wiped away like an actor's make-up, and in its place there was only—how shall I describe it?—sullen defiance mixed with a kind of tense thoughtfulness. He seemed to have shrunk.

"At last he said, 'Oh, well,' very heavily, and offered his wrists.

"I heard a handcuff click. My eyes were full of tears. I realized, then, that I must have known it all along: that I had never seen the man before he came to our office—in short, I knew myself for the little fool that I was.

"The prince, speechless, pointed to me. Duvivier said, 'Starting young, eh? Come on!' and he handcuffed me to the bald man. When I felt the cold steel on my wrist I burst into tears, fell on my knees and cried for mercy.

"The bald man said, 'Let the kid go, gentlemen; he hasn't done a thing. I am entirely to blame.'

"The detectives ignored him, and Duvivier said to me, 'You should have thought of all that before you took to crime, you little scoundrel! Get up! . . . It is lucky for you, Prince Szekel, that we came in time. Lassiter wouldn't have left you the shirt to your back.'

"The count bellowed, 'But you did not come in time! The mischief is done! I shall be the laughing-stock of the country! . . . This was your idea, Szekel!'

"'My idea? My idea? Take care what you say, D'Oz . . . but we'll deal with that later. Meanwhile, what in the world are we to do? How can we possibly tell our guests? He has made a fool of all of us, D'Oz, but you and I are the responsible parties, and the biggest fools of the lot!'

"'You swine!' shouted the count right into the bald man's face. 'Where are all the jewels? The money? Return it all this instant or by——' He gripped the bald man by the throat and shook him.

"Any trace of manhood that might ever have been discernible in me had run out of my eyes. I cried, 'I know where it is, Inspector—in his bedroom, in a little black valise! He's got the key in his pocket, sir!'

"At this, the bald man looked down at me and smiled with infinite pity; took a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket with his free hand, threw it to me, and said, 'Blow your nose, cry-baby.'

"The prince left the room. The count then turned his attention to me. He said, 'Why did you say that this dirty thief was Bull Penhaligon? Speak, before I screw your head off, you shrimp!'

" ' I didn't—I didn't say, Your Excellency ! ' I sobbed ; and in a few words I told them about the concocting of the interview, and of my bewilderment when the man I had described appeared in the flesh.

" 'A likely story ! ' said the count. The prince returned with the bag.

" Detective-Inspector Haug said, ' Not unlikely, Your Excellency. Why should Lassiter choose Nixburg, in particular, for his hoax ? I think I can guess how it was. Lassiter had booked from Vienna to Budapest. We had men waiting for him at various points all along the line, and he got wind of it. No doubt the rogue picked up a copy of the paper that contained the interview at some station buffet not far from Nixburg. The rogue can change his face and general appearance in five minutes.

" ' Well, here he is, in a fix. If he goes on, we catch him. If he goes back, we catch him.

" ' The master move, therefore, is to return only two or three stations to this relatively small town and make himself conspicuous as somebody whom all the world knows, but no one has seen. He changes into a grey suit and a grey wig, puts on some of his airs, and there is Bull Penhaligon.'

" Duvivier went through the bald man's pockets with a skilled hand and found the key, opened the valise, and uttered an exclamation as the light struck the jewels. ' H'm ! We had better take charge of this for the moment.' He locked the valise. ' Will you, Your Highness, and you, Your Excellency, be kind enough to seal this bag ? '

" A stick of red wax was brought from the desk and melted into four large blobs, sealing the closed lips of the locked bag. The prince and the count, with their signet rings, pressed home their crests.

" Duvivier said, ' I understand your feelings, gentlemen. You wish to avoid a scandal in the locality.'

" The prince said, ' At all costs. I shall not press a charge.'

" The count said, ' Nor I. But if ever I lay my hands on him he can say his prayers.'

" Duvivier continued, ' No need to press a charge in this case. He's already wanted on so many counts that we have quite enough on him to put him away for life. He will be taken back to Paris.

" ' Meanwhile, we have our reports to write, and certain formalities must be attended to, so we will take him to your local police headquarters, where we will remain until it is time to catch the morning train.

" ' This will give you gentlemen an opportunity to dispose of your guests as if nothing had happened. If they inquire after the noble Penhaligon, tell them he is indisposed with a migraine.

" ' Then, as early as possible in the morning,' Duvivier went on, ' you can come and retrieve your property and that of your guests, and return the various articles to their respective owners, making the excuse that . . . the noble Penhaligon is not quite ready yet, but will return or something. You may say, in all honesty, that he has been summoned by the President of France to fulfil a previous obligation, and must also present himself at court in Vienna. That should solve your problem.'

"'Meanwhile,' said Detective-Inspector Haug impatiently, 'I recommend that Your Highness sends his secretary upstairs to bring down a suit of day clothes for these miscreants. They will be a little conspicuous by daylight in that get-up.'

"The secretary was dispatched upstairs. The count, crushed, sat clutching his hair. The prince poured cognac for the detectives. I was paralyzed with woe.

"The secretary returned with a suitcase. 'Off we go,' said Duvivier, giving the bald man a hard shove, but handling me quite gently. 'Until the morning, Your Highness . . . Until the morning, Your Excellency. Sorry to have spoiled your party . . . Good night.'

"We went out by a back door. In the ballroom, the band was playing a brisk polka. Haug whistled shrilly and a great motor car drove up.

"'Get in, you two,' said Duvivier. He sat in front with the driver. Haug sat in the back seat with the bald man and me. 'Police headquarters!'

"THE great car went roaring away through the forest. Once we swerved to avoid a young doe that stood hypnotized by our head lamps, and miraculously escaped collision with a great tree. Soon I saw the lights of the town and, thinking of my coming ordeal, I cried again.

"'Here's police headquarters,' said Duvivier at last.

"But the car did not stop.

"Haug said to the chauffeur, 'All right, Bubu; get onto the big road and step on it!'

"Then the bald man spoke. He said to Duvivier, 'That was nice work, Papke, my friend, very nice indeed.'

"Duvivier—or rather, Papke—said, 'Not bad, George, though I say so myself. But why didn't you just take the stuff and hop off all on your own? Didn't you over-complicate it?'

"'I think not. How was I to get away? In one of the prince's or the count's cars, the most conspicuous in Hungary? Disappear mysteriously, and have inquiries telegraphed all over Europe before dawn? No, this is better. No one will budge before ten o'clock in the morning—it wouldn't look nice. After that there'll be a hundred telegrams and calls and special messengers to Vienna, Paris, and what-not, by which time we'll be clear without any hue and cry. Mark my words, it'll be twenty-four hours before anything starts moving.'

"'How did you do?' asked Haug.

"'Very nicely. Unless my eyes deceived me, there's a matter of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of ice in that little black bag . . . Oh, by the by, you might hand over the key of these handcuffs, Papke.'

"'Wait a minute,' said the man called Papke, while Haug asked, 'What the devil are we going to do with the half portion?'

"The bald man said, 'We'll put him down near a town over the border . . . Look sharp with that key, will you?'

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" ' We'll stop round the next bend,' said the man called Papke, and at the next bend, sure enough, the car stopped.

" ' Well, here's where we get out, George,' said Haug, and opened the door. Papke got out also.

" ' Here's where you get out, George,' he said, in his good-natured way, and half dragged us onto the road. ' You held out on the Naples job and the Crédit Lyonnais business, and you thought we didn't know, didn't you, George ? ' he said. ' Well, we've got the ice to begin with, and now I'll trouble you for the cash. Hand it over, George ! '

" At the sight of these two men standing there in the light of the false dawn, I believe I went really mad. I screamed and tugged at the handcuff.

" I always was a little-boned fellow, and then my bones were soft while my hands were wet with fear. I felt the steel slide over my knuckles and slip away. My hand was free. As I staggered back, I must have created a diversion, for when I looked up, the man called Papke had completely disappeared ! The bald man had knocked him down a steep slope at the edge of the road and was engaging Haug in a desperate struggle.

" Haug had a pistol, but not for long. I heard a bone snap and saw the pistol bouncing in the dust. The bald man grasped him by the lapels with one hand and was balancing the other to hit him, when the chauffeur Bubu came up behind and knocked him down with a little flexible club.

" Then the man called Papke came crawling up the slope, covered with blood and twigs, like an ogre.

" The three of them began to tear at the bald man's clothes. His waistcoat was open and his shirt was loose. They were fumbling with the buckles of the money belt when, from round the bend, came the hooting of a car horn.

" Instantly they stood upright, shoved the bald man with their feet over the edge of the slope, leaped into the car and drove furiously away in a great cloud of dust.

" When the car had passed, I crept out of the bushes and looked down the slope. The bald man was sitting up.

" I slid down to him. The sun had risen now. I simply sat and stared at him.

" He stared back at me for a second or two, and then let out such a roar of laughter that the wood pigeons flapped up, startled, from the trees ; and somehow I had to laugh with him.

" ' They have gone,' I said.

" He replied : ' Ah, well, let them go. It will be a devilishly tricky business, getting rid of those stones for the next year or two. Frozen capital. I have the liquid assets.' He opened one of the pockets in his belt and took out five perfectly clean thousand-*pengö* notes, which he handed to me, saying, ' Here, Zoltan . . . travelling expenses.'

" ' Travelling expenses ? Travelling expenses to where ? '

" ' Anywhere but Nixburg, Zoltan, where I fancy you won't be

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welcome any more. And I must travel too. Do not think unkindly of me, and do not blame yourself for having believed me. Good-bye.'

" I thought of Nixburg, and my mother, and of Magda, and I put my face in my hands and wept once more. When I looked up, I was alone in the wide world.

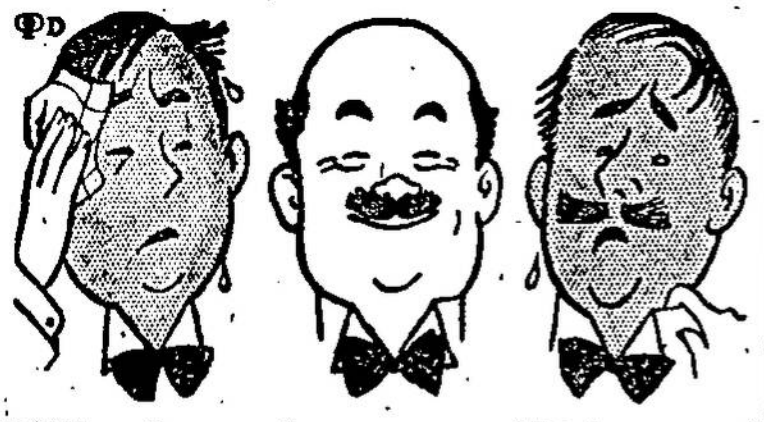
" Then I wandered until I found a farmhouse, where I bought something to eat and some old clothes. I carried my evening clothes away in a bundle which, when the day grew hotter, I threw into a ditch. And that was the end of my first dress suit!

" Ever since then, I have been wandering from place to place, getting more and more particular about checking facts . . . And all the time getting more and more short-sighted, so that I mistake Dr. J. Edgar Hoover for Burl Ives."

POOR little Kis sighed and shook his head.

I asked him, " Did you ever learn anything of the real Bull Penhaligon? "

Kis replied, " Oh, yes! He was a she, a lady. Her name was Miss Dora Penhaligon Bullivant. She was born with one leg shorter than the other and a large strawberry birthmark which covered the entire left side of her face. So she lived in a little cottage near Uxbridge in England, and never went out except to sit in the garden. She died in 1915. But I cannot imagine her like that. I always see Bull Penhaligon as a man with the head of a lion, with a star on his

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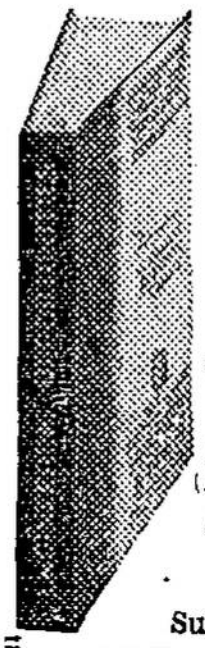

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breast, hobnobbing with princes and dancing with the Baroness Marmora in the great ballroom, before they tore off his hair in the library."

"By the way," I said, "I am not J. Edgar Hoover. I repeat, my name is Kersh. K-E-R-S-H."

"Are you sure?" he asked suspiciously.

"Quite sure."

He wrote the name on a little bit of paper, muttering, "If he says so, I suppose I must believe him . . . I will never get my facts right . . . Oh, one must be so careful, so careful."

His cigar had gone out. He cleaned the end carefully and put it in his waistcoat pocket among the pencils. I saw him to the door. He went away in the direction of Fifth Avenue, and I never saw or heard of him again.

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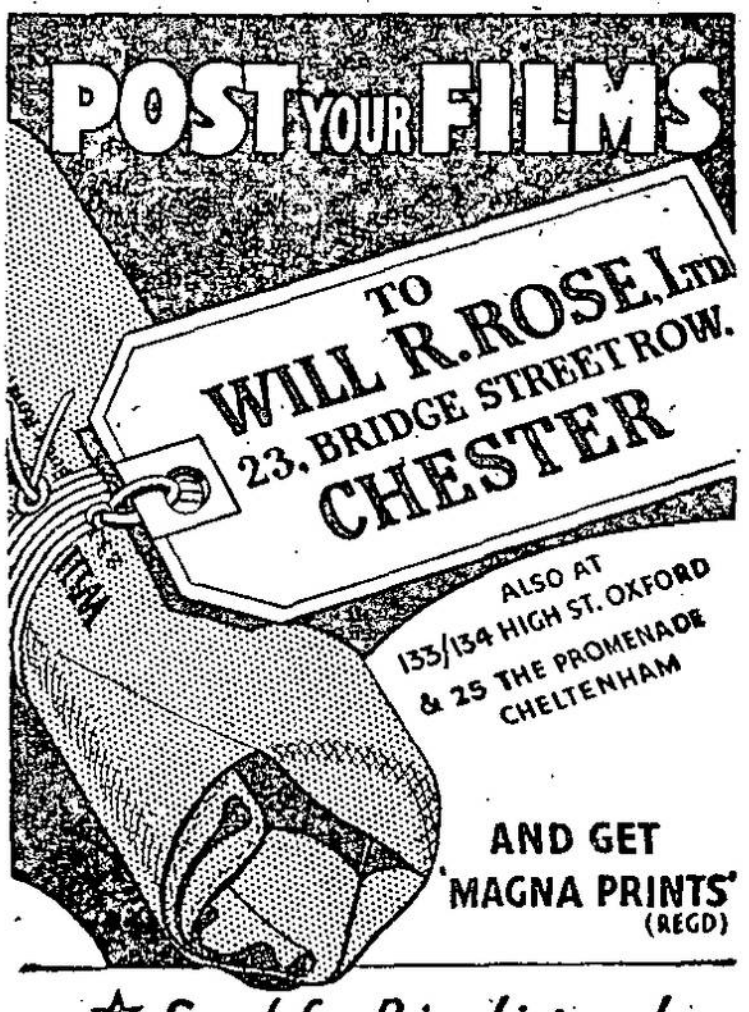


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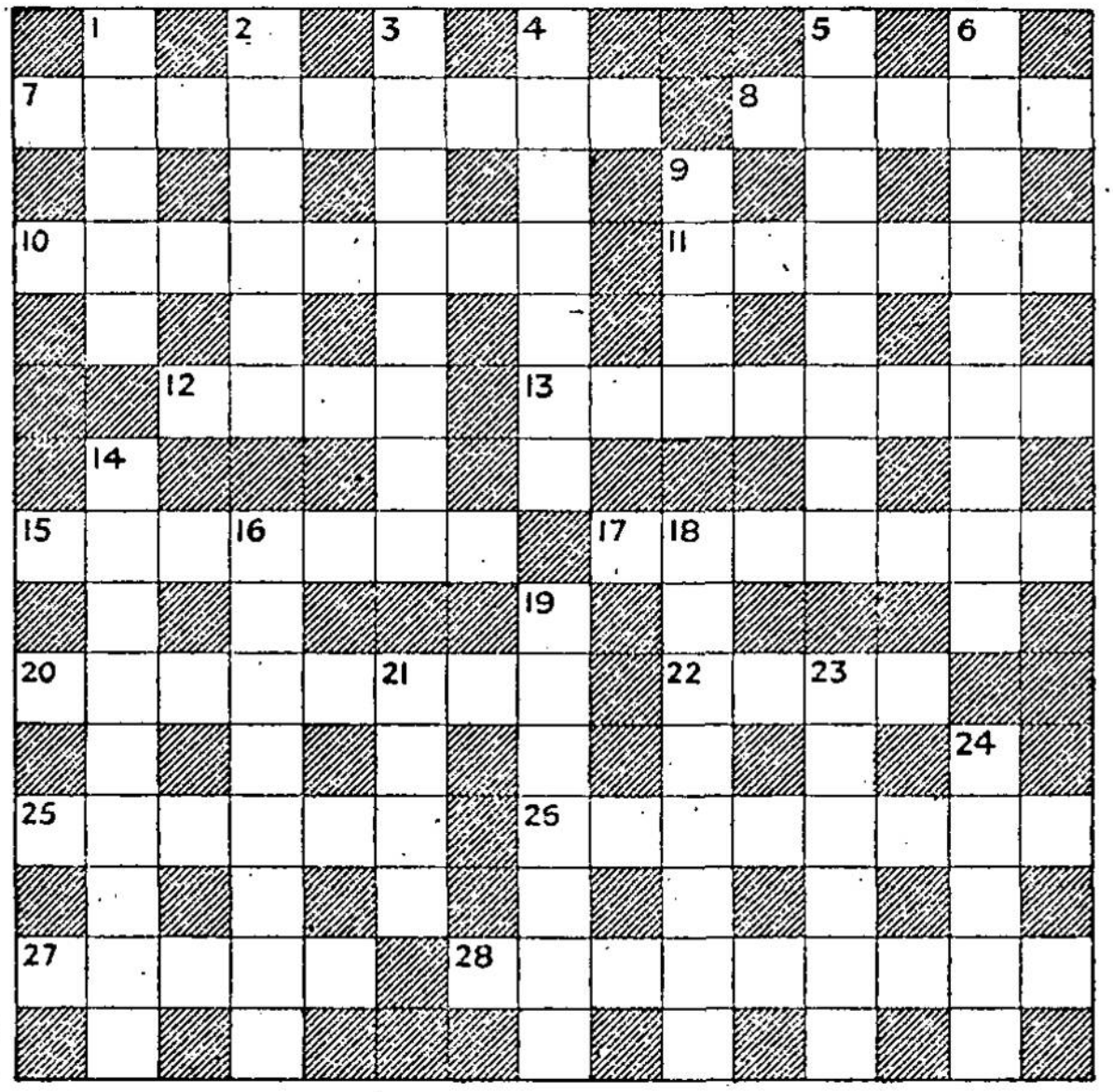
# *ARGOSY CROSS WORD*

**Solution on page 89**



## CLUES

### Across

**7** This rodent sounds like a valuable piece of meat (6-3).

**8** A rook from an arid part of Africa (5).

**10** A song about the States amounts to a festive occasion (8).

**11** The subject of a novel by George Meredith, though not, as one might suppose, of his autobiography (6).

**12** As her name suggests, this Catherine was more than equal to Henry (4).

**13** A bit of Scotland to let in gay surroundings (8).

**15** Ragtime turns to fly (7).

**17** A yardstick, generally (2, 1, 4).

**20** There's an urge in me for confectionery ! (8).

**22** Carried away in part (4).

**25** The outlaw's injunction to stick together ? (6).

**26** His performance should be well conducted (8).

**27** "O there the chestnuts, summer through, Beside the river make for you A tunnel of green—" (Rupert Brooke) (5).

**28** Two elements combine in a spirit of strength (9).

### Down

**1** Handel would have liked his lyre (5).

**2** Fowl Italian town (6).

**3** It sounds as if this ancient language were without comment (8).

**4** The cultivation of cash crops ? (7).

**5** An addled egg has this kind of unpopularity (3, 5).

**6** This artist should be at home in a police station (9).

**9** The kind of tent which simply asks to be struck ! (4).

**14** Inspired gymnastics appropriate to this sort of cellar ? (4-5).

**16** Prelude to a storm, by Chopin (8).

**18** Abandoned in a London street (8).

**19** All I beg is a very poor security (3-4).

**21** "There has fallen a splendid tear From the passion-flower at the—" (Tennyson) (4).

**23** An order we are all willing to receive (6).

**24** A valuable stratum in the hen-house (5).

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